Beyond Death

THE POLITICS OF SUICIDE & MARTYRDOM IN KOREA

EDITED BY Charles R. Kim, Jungwon Kim, Hwasook Nam, AND Serk-Bae Suh

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The Politics of Suicide and Martyrdom in Korea

Edited by CHARLES R. KIM, JUNGWON KIM,
HWASOOK NAM, *and* SERK-BAE SUH

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Edited by Charles R. Kim, Jungwon Kim, Hwasook Nam, and Serk-Bae Suh
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Acknowledgments

The inception of this project dates back to 2011, in the parking lot of a hotel in Urbana, Illinois. Hwasook Nam was on her way to the airport to return to Seattle after giving an inspiring talk at the University of Illinois. During her visit, Hwasook Nam and Jungwon Kim had maintained a running conversation about the meaning of voluntary death in Korean history, and it was while parting in the parking lot that we decided to extend the discussion to include other scholars. As a result, Hwasook Nam put together a panel for the 2012 Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference, at which four papers were presented under the theme of "The Politics of Suicide and Martyrdom in Korean History." The panelists were Hwasook Nam, Jungwon Kim, Junghwan Cheon, and Deberniere Torrey, joined by Sujin Kim as a discussant.

Our investigation continued with another workshop that Hwasook Nam organized with support from the Center for Korean Studies at the University of Washington in 2013, made possible by an Academy of Korean Studies Grant. Franklin Rausch, Ho Kim, and Amanda Swain joined Nam, Kim, and Cheon in presenting papers at the workshop, while Heekyoung Cho and Seung Hee Jeon provided invaluable feedback during the discussions. Encouraged by Clark W. Sorensen, director of the University of Washington's Center for Korean Studies, we started to plan an edited volume that would expand the topic of discourses on suicide and martyrdom beyond the discipline of history. In the meantime, Charles Kim and Serk-Bae Suh organized a 2014 AAS panel with a similar focus, titled "Meaningful Deaths: Political Martyrdom in Modern and Contemporary Korea." Theodore Hughes, who participated as the discussant, provided insightful comments to the

presenters. Papers given in the second AAS panel by Sun-Chul Kim, Youngju Ryu, and Suh were added to the volume, and the editorial team solicited contributions from George Kallander, Yerim Kim, and Young Chae Seo soon afterward. In the spring of 2015, the co-editors met for a stimulating roundtable hosted by the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University. This session was essential because it enabled us to set the course for the remaining stages of the project.

We wish to thank the numerous scholars who enriched this project with their expert feedback in the panels, the workshop, and the roundtable. We also thank the anonymous reviewer whose incisive criticism improved the manuscript in many ways. Sixiang Wang and Youngju Ryu deserve our gratitude for their excellent translations of chapter 2 and of chapter 10. In addition, we are grateful to Clark W. Sorensen for his encouragement and support, starting with the UW workshop and through to the project's completion. We extend our gratitude to Theodore Hughes, director of the Center for Korean Research, for furnishing support for the Columbia roundtable. Finally, we thank Tracy Stober for her skillful copyediting of the entire volume.

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Introduction

CHARLES R. KIM and JUNGWON KIM

In the July 1927 issue of the magazine *Kaebyŏk* (Creation), an article appeared on the topic of suicide. Titled "Chasal ŭi wŏnin ŭn hyŏndae munmyŏng" (Modern civilization: The source of suicide), it deplored the high suicide rate as something that had never existed in Korea's past and as the most miserable byproduct of the changes generated by modern civilization. The unnamed author discussed various factors driving people to reach the point of killing themselves and described the police office of the Yongsan district in Seoul hanging a sign which stated "please wait for a moment" on the railroad bridge over the Han River in an effort to deter people from jumping into the river. While criticizing those who commit suicide spontaneously, the author placed a larger portion of the blame on modern civilization, viewing it as the fundamental factor leading to the not unfamiliar tragedy.[1]

Suicide has resurfaced as a major concern in contemporary South Korea. For twelve years (2006–17), following the impact of the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–98, the country has had the highest suicide rate in the world among Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. In South Korea, throwing oneself off a bridge over the Han River remains a common way to take one's life. In a 2014 opinion piece for the *New York Times*, writer Young-ha Kim relates that Mapo Bridge, one of the Han River bridges most frequently used for this purpose, has become known as the "Suicide Bridge." Samsung Life Insurance attempted to redefine the site as the "Bridge of Life" by, among other things, installing illuminated panels displaying such messages as "I know it's been hard for you" and "How are you today?" Subsequently, however, there was a six-fold increase in suicides

off the Mapo Bridge.[2] Poverty among the elderly, education-related anxiety among the youth, and economic uncertainty among the middle-aged are commonly cited as the chief factors behind suicide in South Korea. While these phenomena do represent pieces of a complicated puzzle, they by no means explain why South Koreans are taking their own lives at a rate of nearly thirty out of every 100,000 people. Echoing the *Kaebyŏk* essayist in 1927, Young-ha Kim subordinates the most commonly cited factors in order to emphasize that Koreans are viewing suicide "as a viable escape from the stresses of modern life."

Of course, suicide is by no means strictly a modern phenomenon. Debates over "meaningful suicide" had persisted throughout the Chosŏn Dynasty, both within the government and in the writings of scholars. Especially when facing a dilemma that threatened a person's loyalty, chastity, and filiality—the overarching Confucian principles that governed Chosŏn society—the path to vindication was an intricate one, closely associated with one's socio-political position, social and marital status, and gender. In twentieth-century Korea, meaningful suicide and the sacrifice of one's life for a cause were intimately linked to the politics of national sovereignty, anticolonial resistance, and postcolonial democratization. Throughout the premodern and modern eras, the questions of what actions to commemorate, whose deaths should be regarded honorable, and how the stories of martyrdom should be narrated are therefore thorny ones that require thorough examination in the light of key cultural concepts. These are the inquiries this volume takes on, and it presents a rich array of approaches by scholars in different fields as it explores the shifting meanings of honorable death and martyrdom in Korean historiography.

At first glance, the meaningful deaths described above and the heightened frequency of suicide in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Korea seem to constitute two distinct topics. The former can reveal a great deal about the interface between historical actors and sophisticated fields of governmental, political, and intellectual discourse shaped by history. On the other hand, suicide as an emergent societal phenomenon in the modern era is taken up by researchers, policymakers, concerned citizens, and the media as the product of a set of socioeconomic problems that should be reduced or eliminated. However, we believe that there is a connection between meaningful deaths and atomized suicides. In both cases, the taking of one's own life should be

seen as the ultimate expression of despair, sacrifice, or dissent in the face of the difficulties engendered by social and economic contradictions, in conjunction with the pressures of historical change. During the Chosŏn era, meaningful deaths were central to the reproduction and slow evolution of the socio-political order, as well as to the maintenance of familial prestige amidst the reality of intensifying social competition among yangban elites. Toward the end of the Chosŏn Dynasty, the choice between faith and death became even more pronounced as reflected in both rhetorical and extreme physical acts of violence. Like numerous widows facing moral dilemmas, Catholics in government custody typically encountered the choice between giving up their faith and exile, or maintaining their faith and death. Indeed, the choice one made determined how he or she would be viewed by posterity, validating one's integrity and life.

In the early twentieth century, the upsurge in individual suicides should be seen as the outgrowth of Koreans' troubled interactions with modern capitalism and liberalism under the statist constraints of colonial rule—or, in the words of the *Kaebyŏk* essayist, with "modern civilization."[3] We see the emergence of Korea's modern practices of martyrdom as an integral part of political and intellectual struggles over how best to confront the distressing problems of modernity from a nation-centered perspective. At the same time, the strategic uses of meaningful deaths in the twentieth century evolved from the existing practices of the Chosŏn era. After Liberation in 1945, in South Korea the politics of martyrdom evolved further into a specialized set of cultural symbols and practices that gave acute expression to the social and economic suffering of life under authoritarian developmentalism, intensified by Cold War realities. In the twenty-first-century present, protest suicides typically fail to elicit much of a response from a largely indifferent South Korean public. But even as the current pattern regarding self-immolation does not show signs of changing in the near future, the loss of life retains the potential of having a major impact in the sphere of politics. Most recently, public outrage over the accidental deaths of 304 people in the Sewol Ferry Disaster (April 16, 2014) played a central role in the massive candlelight protests of 2016–17, which culminated in the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye (Pak Kŭnhye, 2013–17).[4] In unforeseeable ways, the premature claiming of life can still be used to give powerful—and effectual—expression to deep-seated indignation over political injustice and social inequity.[5]

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In contemporary Korea, the common term for someone who has sacrificed his/her life for the sake of one's faith is "*yŏlsa*," or "martyr." *Yŏl* (Ch. *lie*, 烈)—a character made up of two parts, "to list" (*yŏl*, 列) and "fire" (*hwa*, 火), literally meaning "fires in rows"—is broadly interpreted as "fierce, strong, and violent." Adding the character *sa* (a scholar, man, 士), yŏlsa therefore refers to a man of upright spirit, although not every scholar or person of integrity can achieve this title. Bestowed posthumously, the title requires bodily performance of the yŏl ideal that also needs to be recognized publicly. A yŏlsa, regardless of gender, proves his/her persistent faith through self-sacrifice—mostly by death. One of the earliest usages of this term is found in Kim Pusik's (1075–1151) *Samguk sagi* (History of the Three Kingdoms, 三國史記), the oldest extant history of Korea. In a biography of Kim Yusin (595–673), the famous Silla general recognized for his critical role during the unification of the Three Kingdoms, Kim Pusik attributes to Kim Yusin the following words: "I [Kim Yusin] hear that what the mind of yŏlsa (烈士之志) consists of is sacrificing one's life upon a crisis and forgetting about the self while enduring difficulties."[6] Although it cannot be known whether or not Kim Yusin ever used the exact term, the meaning of yŏlsa in this text echoes Kim Pusik's own vision of a Confucian scholar's proper relation to the state. Interestingly, the term "yŏlsa" appears sporadically in the *Koryŏsa* (History of Koryŏ). On one occasion in 1370, it was paired with another term, "*ch'ungsin*" (loyalist, 忠臣) in an imperial edict sent to the Koryŏ King Kongmin (r. 1351–74) by the Chinese emperor of the newly established Ming Dynasty.[7] While it is difficult to decipher the true meaning of yŏlsa in this Chinese context, the fact that yŏlsa is distinguished from ch'ungsin raises the question of its definition of that time. Indeed, borrowing the Qing official Mao Qiling's (1623–1716) argument, Koon-piu Ho notes that discourse on the duty of a loyal official first appeared during the Song Dynasty (920–1279), without historical roots.[8]

During Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910), several different terms were adopted to describe people who performed an ideal-driven death, including "*ŭisa*" (men of righteousness, 義士) and "*chŏlsa*" (men of fidelity, 節士), rather than "yŏlsa." The character yŏl, instead, was more commonly used to designate women of virtue, *yŏl-lyŏ* (chaste women, 烈女). It is rare to encounter a usage

of *yŏl-lam* (chaste men, 烈男) in writings produced during the Chosŏn period—whether for men dying for loyalty (to the state) or for chastity (spousal faith).[9] Nor did being a designated chaste woman (*yŏl-lyŏ*) automatically mean an ideal-driven death, although toward later Chosŏn Dynasty many women who were recognized for their chastity had attained the reputation by their deaths. How, then, did the term "yŏlsa" become somewhat universal and dominant in labeling patriotic martyrs over time, especially at the turn of the twentieth century?

Examining the actions and discourse on honorable death and martyrdom in Korean history therefore entails an understanding of the concept of yŏl and its historical evolution. The use of yŏl in referring to those who displayed supreme virtue has a long history in Korea. Traditionally, yŏl is one of the cardinal Confucian principles, or *samgang* (three bonds, 三綱), along with *ch'ung* (loyalty, 忠) and *hyo* (filiality, 孝). Although the Koryŏ Dynasty (918–1392) officially upheld Buddhism as the state ideology, it supported Confucian learning based on these three fundamental human relationships—between king and subject (loyalty), parent and child (filiality), and husband and wife (chastity)—by building institutions that produced Confucian-educated scholar-officials. *The History of Koryŏ*, compiled by early Chosŏn Neo-Confucian scholar-officials, already reveals loyalty and filiality as the core values for running both the political and social realms of Koryŏ society. With the introduction of the Song Chinese scholar Zhu Xi's version of Confucianism in latter part of the Koryŏ Dynasty, followed by the establishment of the Chosŏn state, which upheld Neo-Confucianism as the dominant ideology of social governance, the three basic human relations became even more pronounced and sophisticated.

Throughout the Chosŏn era, honoring and remembering exemplary people—whether alive or dead—were crucial tasks of the state as it sought to promote Confucian morals to the entire society. Under the criteria of loyalty, filiality, and chastity set by the state, those who demonstrated the utmost virtue were officially venerated in a range of practices, such as bestowing posthumous titles on them, building shrines, performing rituals, and publishing biographies of their lives. Many authors of commemorative writings note how crucial it was that these individuals' virtuous actions not be forgotten by later generations but be transmitted to people then still alive, which often appears to have been these writers' primary reason to take up their

brushes. Although the veneration of moral subjects was already carried out by the Koryŏ state, with the foundation of the Chosŏn Dynasty the practice of commemorating virtuous individuals and martyrdom became a central part of state-initiated rituals.

The military conflicts marked by the Imjin War (1592–98) and the Manchu Invasions of Korea (1627, 1636–37), which dominated almost a half century during the mid-Chosŏn Dynasty, produced countless numbers of war dead. What followed was the state-sanctioned commemoration of those loyal dead, resulting in the production of many heroes and heroines. The discourse on dead bodies and on martyrdom preoccupied Chosŏn politics as it set about the daunting task of restoring postwar Korean society.[10] That society was largely left with—and split between—those who had survived the wars and those who had chosen death as their ideal. Deciding who would be honored and who would not, emerged as an urgent matter, and since these decisions could only be made by those who were still alive, the discourse of martyrdom became extremely convoluted. For the dead, having perished proved their commitment to righteousness and virtue; yet for the living, commemorating the dead could highlight their own disgraceful path of avoiding death out of fear.

Although the culture of commemoration had long been the core that gave structure to Chosŏn society, it grew and deepened greatly through these traumatic war experiences, extending its main performers from the central government to the local populations. Responding to the state's call, families and communities not only participated in state-led commemoration activities for their own war dead but also engaged in local modes of remembering the dead through various genres of literary writings. Countless pieces of writing, including circular letters to secure the state's recognition of local martyr figures, illuminate how the second part of the Chosŏn Dynasty became engrossed with the discourse on martyrdom. Among the numerous war dead, women became a keen focus of the discourse on account of their honorable deaths, which often took the form of their choosing to commit suicide rather than fall prey to enemy forces. In a society where the Confucian patriarchal norms governed gender relations, this commemorative space allowed women to be visibly and publicly remembered. In addition, the term "yŏl" became attached exclusively to women of virtue and retained this meaning throughout the rest of the dynasty.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, intellectuals, patriots, and statesmen began to grapple with the question of Korea's position within the complex realities of global capitalist modernity. Facing imperialist pressures from China, Japan, and Russia, Sin Ch'aeho (1880–1936), Ch'oe Namsŏn (1890–1957), and other pioneering intellectuals entreated their countrymen to revive Korea's depleted national spirit in order to stave off the threat of colonization. Influenced by contemporary Euro-American tales of nationalist heroes, such as Giuseppe Mazzini and Count Cavour, they adapted indigenous stories about the famous military heroes Ŭlchi Mundŏk (fl. 612 CE) of the Koguryŏ Dynasty (37 BCE–668 CE) and Yi Sunsin (1545–98) of the Chosŏn Dynasty, as well as other heroic figures of yore to the urgent project of promoting modern nationalist awareness.[11] It was at this juncture that high government official Min Yŏnghwan (1861–1905) committed suicide to protest the signing of the Protectorate Treaty of 1905. Five years later, patriot An Chunggŭn (1879–1910) was executed for his assassination of Japanese statesman Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909). During these same years, thousands of Righteous Army militiamen lost their lives in their fight against the imposition of Japanese rule, which was completed in 1910. With the onset of modern nationalism and the onslaught against Korea's political sovereignty, risking personal safety for one's ideals—and, in particular, sacrificing one's life—took on a narrow, nation-centered meaning that superseded the multiple levels of significance that had existed throughout the Chosŏn era.[12] For example, as part of this major refocusing, women's chastity—the archetypal virtue equal to male loyalty and most highly honored in Chosŏn society—became nothing more than a symbol of Confucian backwardness and a subject to be rigorously contested by reformers at the turn of the twentieth century.

During the colonial era (1910–45), the risking of one's life remained the most powerful way to give expression to patriotic ardor, in particular, against Japanese rule. Following the suppression of the March First Independence movement of 1919, in which as many as one million Koreans demonstrated peacefully to demand the cessation of Japanese rule, segments of nationalist leadership in Korea and in exile turned to violent means as they intensified their resistance to colonialism. Throughout much of the 1920s, members of the Ŭiyŏltan (Righteous patriots corps), which adhered to an anarchist form of nationalism, targeted Japanese apparatuses, including police departments and the Oriental Development Company, in attacks that involved firearms and

explosives. Though not a member of the Ŭiyŏltan, the figure Yun Ponggil (1908–32) is noteworthy for having sacrificed his life in the course of practicing a very similar kind of militant nationalism: Yun was executed for detonating a bomb that caused the deaths of a Japanese general and a high official in a public ceremony held in Shanghai. Like Yun, and An Chunggŭn before him, a number of other patriots, including Yi Pongch'ang, were executed for their role in planning or undertaking resolute acts aimed at advancing the cause of national independence.[13] Countless more martyrs, such as An Ch'angho (1878–1938), Paek Chŏnggi (1896–1934), and Sin Ch'aeho, died on sickbeds and in prisons from illnesses and injuries incurred in the perilous struggle against colonial rule.[14]

Imperial propagandists also held as sacrosanct the risking and the sacrifice of one's life on behalf of the nation. During the second half of the Asia-Pacific War, the colonial state stepped up efforts to recruit colonized Koreans to serve Japan's project of continental expansion and its fight against the Americans and British. Between 1937 and 1945, at least 360,000 Koreans were mobilized as soldiers and civilian employees—and more than twice that number for work in mines and wartime industries.[15] Depending on the individual, the realities of ethnic discrimination against Koreans in colonial society could serve as either a deterrent or a motivator for deciding to join the war cause. Concerning the latter view, serving side by side with Japanese personnel, potential recruits were told, represented a rare opportunity for Koreans to narrow the relations of hierarchy that were maintained between the two peoples—and even to help Koreans become coequals with the Japanese. One sanguine propagandist expressed: "I dream of the time when peninsular youth will gladly die for country and king! Of a glorious day that Koreans become completely Japanese at heart and become prime minister! Will it be after a hundred years or after hundreds of years?"[16] As part of the war effort, even as some Koreans did experience decent treatment, the categories and everyday practices of discrimination remained very much embedded in the military institution.[17] For in truth, realizing interethnic unity under the banner of imperial nationalism was an uneven undertaking. Under these contradictory circumstances, fallen Korean soldiers and, in the final phases of the war, Kamikaze pilots were praised in Korean- and Japanese-language writings and lectures for having paid the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of the Japanese empire.[18]

Many Koreans hoped to parlay military and other war-related service into personal advantage—such as obtaining more favorable employment after the war or receiving some kind of special consideration from colonial authorities. Such pragmatism was employed alike by both infantrymen and military officers and factory workers and propagandists. However, the abrupt conclusion of Japanese rule intervened. While some were able to use their wartime experience to their benefit after 1945, others were stigmatized for abetting the war cause and betraying the Korean nation. Prominent Koreans who had lent their pens and their voices to promote Korean participation in the war fell under particularly intense scrutiny in the wake of Liberation. Among intellectuals, Yi Kwangsu (1892–1950) is representative. In his contribution to this volume, Serk-Bae Suh explores how the novelist and essayist twisted the logic of martyrdom to justify his infamous wartime collaboration and to obscure his part in leading young Koreans to the sacrificial altar of Korean nationalism—which functioned here as a subsidiary to imperial nationalism. Yerim Kim, in her chapter, shifts the focus to evolving postcolonial South Korean memories of Korean student soldiers who fought for the Japanese military. She reveals that in the Cold War political context of the 1950s, what emerged was a distorted ideological narrative that portrayed the soldiers as anticommunist warriors.

Following Liberation, previously repressed memories of anticolonial resistance emerged in public discourse, in both North and South Korea. While northern leaders emphasized the anti-Japanese combat record of Kim Il Sung and other communist nationalists, their southern counterparts focused on liberal-nationalist independence efforts—March First, in particular. In 1948, the controversial Syngman Rhee (Yi Sŭngman, 1948–60) regime laid claim to the mantle of political legitimacy by establishing the new Republic of Korea (ROK) in the name of March First's "spirit of independence."[19] Conservative nationalists in the South put forth nationalist hagiographies of anticolonial resisters that resembled the heroic, nation-centered tales from half a century earlier. Yu Kwansun (1902–20), referred to as "Korea's Joan of Arc," was a preferred subject. The nineteen-year-old student died in prison in 1920 from injuries sustained through torture. She had been incarcerated for her participation in the March First movement. While as many as 7,645 demonstrators were killed in the suppression of the peaceful movement, Yu is perhaps the most readily remembered martyr of the event—and, arguably, the entire colo-

nial era—due to her youth, her recalcitrance, and the tragic circumstances of her death.[20] In addition, ideologues and intellectuals published tales and erected public monuments for other anticolonial heroes that included Yu, An Chunggŭn, and Syngman Rhee. "The Ten Courageous Human Bullets"—a story of heroic anticommunist Korean soldiers derived from the Japanese "human bullets" tale—was also incorporated into the official discourse of patriotic martyrs.[21] Filmmakers, with support from the Rhee regime, made movies paying homage to the patriotic sacrifice of life from recent and distant historical eras, as was often done by Confucian literati during the Chosŏn era at both the state and local levels.[22] Shortly after its inception in 1961, the Park Chung Hee (Pak Chŏnghŭi, 1961–79) regime expanded on the Rhee government's project of commemorating nationalist heroes by awarding *Kŏnguk hunjang* (Orders of Merit for National Foundation) to numerous patriots, including Min Yŏnghwan and Yun Ponggil.

Prior to Park's rise to power, the dissemination of anticolonial resistance memories, central to the Rhee regime's claim to legitimacy, ironically served as an important factor behind the eruption of the April 19 Students' Revolution (1960).[23] Thanks to this post–Korean War mnemonic training, by the late 1950s, middle school, high school, and university students were well-versed in the ideological narratives and symbols of patriotic sacrifice and martyrdom, which they were learning and enacting in their everyday school lives. Spurning their intended function of promoting loyalty to the regime, student leaders used the very same narratives and symbols in their unexpected protest movement of 1960. On April 11, 1960, the body of missing high school student Kim Chuyŏl (1944–60) was discovered in Masan Bay. Kim had been killed in a protest on the night of the March 15 elections, in which Rhee won his fourth presidential term. Confirmation of Kim's brutal death three weeks after the elections sparked the massive demonstrations on April 19 that culminated in the leader being ousted a week later. In the weeks before April 11, there had been numerous street demonstrations in cities around the country, but it was the recovery of the boy's body that furnished the protest movement with the decisive momentum needed to overthrow Rhee. Although Kim had merely been a curious bystander to the March 15 protest, he inadvertently became the first protest martyr of the post-Liberation era. Killed by a teargas canister that penetrated his right eye socket, the high school student's gruesome death heightened the public's outrage over the unpopular regime's

electoral abuses, including its sanction of violence against civilians. The martyrization of Kim Chuyŏl prefigured the emergence of a recurring pattern in which activists and intellectuals centered on young yŏlsa as potent symbols of dissident—and popular—disaffection for the injustices perpetrated by subsequent authoritarian leaders in South Korea.

Chun Tae-il's (Chŏn T'aeil, 1948–70) self-immolation was the next significant instance of martyrdom.[24] Chun, a twenty-two-year-old garment cutter, set himself on fire in calling for an end to the horrendous labor conditions in the sweatshops in Seoul's Tongdaemun Market. Aggrieved people had committed suicide in the previous decade to give voice to their socioeconomic difficulties or their political beliefs. But in a juncture characterized by deepening political and economic contradictions, Chun's impassioned plea for humanity and justice struck a powerful chord. As Hwasook Nam shows in her chapter, guilt-infused memories of Chun's shocking act served as a prevalent impetus for students and workers to become actively involved in democracy and labor activism during the full-scale authoritarianism of the Yusin era (1972–79) and into the 1980s. Inadvertently, moreover, memories of his death cleared space for suicide protest in South Korea's repertoire of contention. There would be only one more suicide protest in the 1970s—that of university student Kim Sangjin, who in 1975 took his life by slicing open his abdomen with a knife. But, as Sun-Chul Kim documents in his chapter, the incidence of suicide protest increased significantly in the 1980s and actually increased to an even greater degree in the years immediately following the democratic transition of 1987. The Kwangju Uprising of May 18–27, 1980 was a key factor in this upward trend.

The Kwangju Uprising began as a peaceful student demonstration in protest of General Chun Doo-hwan's (Chŏn Tuhwan, 1980–88) move to consolidate his power as the country's next authoritarian leader, following the assassination of Park Chung Hee in October 1979.[25] Chun dispatched elite paratroopers to suppress the demonstration with brutal force. Over 200 civilian protestors were killed during the ten days of the Kwangju Uprising, and, subsequently, many more people suffered indefinitely from injuries and from trauma sustained during the event. The Kwangju Uprising was exceptional because it was the first time since the late 1940s that South Korean military forces had been dispatched to engage in the armed suppression of a civilian demonstration.[26] May 1980 lay bare the disconnection that existed between

Chun's rising military regime and popular hopes for the realization of democracy following Park's death. In doing so, the event cemented the emergent political identity of the subaltern national masses or *minjung*.[27] The communitarian ethics that drove the minjung movement undergirded the sense of guilt and responsibility that survivors felt toward activists who had perished in the Kwangju Uprising. In their chapters, Jung-hwan Cheon and Young Chae Seo explore how survivors of the uprising drew on the ethics of the community to continue the struggle against the political and economic inequities of the 1980s and the 1990s and to uphold the memories of early and recent martyrs of the prodemocracy movement.

Suicide protest happened with alarming frequency in the 1980s, starting with the deaths of Kim Ŭigŭi three days after the conclusion of the Kwangju Uprising and that of Kim T'aehun one year after the event. The two university students threw themselves off buildings. In total, there were at least twenty-seven suicide protests—seventeen by self-immolation—between 1980 and 1987. While suicide protest occupied a central place in the politics of martyrdom, so too did the deaths of young activists who were killed by agents dispatched by Chun Doo-hwan's authoritarian regime. The 1987 deaths of university students Pak Chongch'ŏl and Yi Hanyŏl made an especially large impact. The former died at the hands of police interrogators, the latter by an errant teargas canister fired during a student demonstration that opposed Chun's maneuvers to install his close associate Roh Tae-woo (1988–93) as his presidential successor. As noted by Young Chae Seo and by Youngju Ryu in this volume, outcry over these deaths resulted in the escalation of the protest movement that culminated, in June 1987, in Chun's submission to demands that he hold democratic elections later in the year. This hard-earned victory against the unpopular leader constituted South Korea's democratic transition. However, symptomatic of the unresolved shortcomings in the political system, the politics of martyrdom maintained currency after this milestone. Fifty-nine people took their lives to express their indignation over the slowness of post-transition reform in politics and labor between 1986 and 1991. Forty-nine of these suicide protests were by burning. In 1991 alone, twelve activists committed self-immolation—including the heart-wrenching case of nineteen-year-old undergraduate Pak Sŭnghŭi. The chapters by Sun-Chul Kim and Jung-hwan Cheon explore the paradoxical increase in the frequency of suicide protests—by burning, in particular—during the four years following

the democratic triumph of June 1987. In the final chapter of this volume, Youngju Ryu scrutinizes former dissident luminary Kim Chiha's (b. 1941) public criticism, in 1991, of the rise in self-immolations that followed the end of authoritarian rule. Kim's surprising invective—apostatic to the shocked activist community—prefigured his conservative political stances in recent years and, by extension, the renewed bifurcation of public discourse that afflicts South Korean politics in the post–Cold War age.

SHARED PATTERNS

While the contributors to this volume explore suicide and martyrdom in a variety of historical contexts, three basic patterns are relevant to each chapter. First, the meaning of death is produced posthumously. A lost life only acquires symbolic power through the discursive process in which surviving interpreters create the meaning or meanings of that death. An individual who commits suicide for a greater ideal or cause, such as chastity or labor rights, likely has some sense of the ways in which survivors will derive meaning from the powerful act that he or she has resolved to take. Nonetheless, however accurate that sense might end up becoming, individuals and groups other than the deceased undertake the process of meaning production. The posthumous production of meaning is perhaps most salient in accidental deaths in the cases of chaste woman martyrs and that of Yi Hanyŏl. Although death was not the direct result of premeditated action in these cases, it exerted a powerful impact due to the ways in which survivors and other interpreters ascribed meaning. It is important to note, moreover, that meaning-making usually does not conclude upon the arrival of a singular, fixed meaning. The production of meaning is an ongoing process that is often characterized by contestation and by the involvement of multiple interpretive communities, as well as of the government in power. This reality is particularly evident in the final five chapters, which detail the shifting interpretations of martyrdom during and after the South Korean democracy movement.

Remembering the loss of a martyr's life usually reaffirms the shared values of the interpretive community as examined in George Kallander's chapter on the Tonghak martyrdoms. It often inspires more intense ardor and belief in the cause, and it can propel other adherents to take their lives. As Ho Kim and Jungwon Kim discuss, the culture of commemorating suicide and mar-

tyrdom are of central importance not only to the meaning-making process—whether mandated by the state or utilized by non-state agents—but also for understanding the ways in which survivors are shaped by an influential death from the past. The culture of commemoration has varied according to historical context and to the associated systems of belief.

This brings us to the second pattern. Death has drawn symbolic power through its connection to a religious or ethico-moral discourse, or some combination thereof. The chapters of this volume that deal with the Chosŏn era explore the ways in which suicide and martyrdom were significant in relation to Neo-Confucianism, Tonghak religion, and Catholicism.

Chapters on the twentieth century focus on suicide and martyrdom in large part from nation-centered perspectives. While nationalist writings and practices do not constitute a robust ethico-moral discourse per se, they are informed by ethical guidelines and moral prescriptions that have figured centrally in the most salient cases of twentieth-century suicide and martyrdom. Moreover, martyrs have readily combined this nation-centered discourse with Neo-Confucianism, Christianity, social-democratic theory, and other influential systems of belief in committing their acts of self-sacrifice. Similarly, meaning producers have used nation-centered ideals in conjunction with religious and social ideals in order to put forth compelling interpretations of death. In numerous cases, interpreters referenced common-sense ethics and morality, especially as understood through the values of family and community, in rendering the meaning of self-sacrifice. While Yi Kwangsu resorted to using family relations to rationalize his false martyrdom, the posthumous narrativization of the deaths of Chun Tae-il, Pak Sŭnghŭi, and other democracy and labor activists drew force from community-based relations and emotions that merged seamlessly with oppositional, nation-centered discourses. Indeed, as the outcry against statist developmentalism and social inequity gathered momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, activists and intellectuals were particularly effective in evoking communitarian ideals to enact, interpret, and build on the sacrifices of their dissident brethren.

The centrality of nation in South Korean politics has sometimes placed nationalist discourse in tension with theories of politics, society, and the economy. As Hwasook Nam reveals in her chapter, the coalescing, subaltern-centered nationalism of the minjung movement resulted in the erasure of Chun Tae-il's background as a part of an embryonic network of worker-

activists driven by visions of greater justice and equity specific to a society in the throes of rapid economic development. More recently, in the postindustrial era, South Korea's triumphalist narrative of economic development—and, by extension, the exigency of maintaining the nation's competitiveness in the volatile global economy—have combined to override issues of economic reform. Under these circumstances, in comparison with the 1970s and 1980s, the continuing suicide protests undertaken by labor and antiglobalization activists in the twenty-first century have not made a measurable impact on either policymakers or the South Korean public. At the same time, the interlinked celebration of and nail-biting over the nation's economic performance have constituted a substantial obstacle to social progressives who have sought to broaden the country's meager social safety net in order to reduce the high suicide rates among the elderly indigent and other struggling social groups. It is important to reiterate that ideals of sacrifice and martyrdom on behalf of the nation have been put to use for variegated political purposes. As the contributors to this volume show, nation-centered ideals have been enacted in support of the Chosŏn state, the Japanese imperial state, and the authoritarian South Korean state, as well as in ways that were deemed to be radically separate from and even hostile to these political entities.

Third, suicide and martyrdom are gendered. Scholars argue that wifely fidelity (*yŏl*) was equated with political loyalty and emphasize that Chosŏn officials—especially in response to periods of crisis such as dynastic change (the Koryŏ-Chosŏn transition) and war (the Imjin Wars and Manchu Invasions)—made explicit connections between female chastity and male loyalty to the state. While loyalty to the state (*ch'ung*) was generally the purview of (elite) men, chastity (*yŏl*) became exclusively applied to women, for it was mostly used to describe a widow who continued to uphold fidelity to her deceased husband. Throughout Chosŏn, the term "yŏlsa" (chaste martyrs) did not make its appearance as often as the *ch'ungsin* (loyal subject) in referring to one's sacrifice for the sake of the state. Exclusively expected for women to fulfill, under the ideal of yŏl, self-inflicted violence in the form of socially sanctioned actions, such as widow suicide, began to be more valued toward the later part of Chosŏn, becoming a highly visible part of the dynasty's cultural life that transcended even the bounds of filiality.

In post-1945 South Korea, memories of An Chunggŭn and Yu Kwansun—the two most widely remembered martyrs of the independence struggle—

reflect the gender division at the core of modern nation-centered discourse. The former has been remembered in the idiom of a male-centered "muscular nationalism" characterized by vigor, fitness, and self-sacrifice on behalf of the nation.[28] Postcolonial memories of Yu Kwansun have highlighted her social identities as a schoolgirl, as well as a loyal daughter and nurturing older sister. That she was a nineteen-year-old student at the time of her death tended to evoke greater indignation over her horrific suffering at the hands of the Japanese authorities. Not surprisingly, hagiographers typically exaggerated the brutalities that she endured following her arrest in 1919. Moreover, representing Yu as a dutiful female family member reflects the prevalent trend in nationalist discourse of subordinating women's roles to the male-centered nation prevalent in nationalist discourse.

This gendered vision for nationalist action was apparent in interpretations of the April 19 Students' Revolution (1960). Contemporary observers framed the student protestors in the principled and muscular mold of An Chunggŭn, with a concomitant emphasis on patriotic bloodshed. Female participation was typically portrayed as being supplementary to the contributions of male students. For example, the provision of food and water by schoolgirls and women for the predominantly male street marchers was reported in the media and in participant accounts. Another widely circulated media representation was the mourning of mothers and other female relatives who had lost a loved one during the protests. Significantly, the media and activists did not connect the death of Kim Chuyŏl to the memory of Yu Kwansun. This connection was saved for Chin Yŏngsuk. Killed by police gunfire on April 19, 1960 in Seoul, the middle school student received passing attention in the media for her tragic victimization as the "second Yu Kwansun."[29] The patriotic masculinity of Kim Chuyŏl, as a victim of political injustice, and of the male-centered student protests of April 1960, was thereby left intact. Remembrances and representations of Yu, An, and the April 1960 demonstrators reflect the broader reality that suicide protest and martyrdom have largely fallen under the purview of male-centered nationalism during the modern era. Women's deaths have typically been treated as evocative—yet subsidiary—contributions to the androcentric projects of liberating the colonized nation and democratizing the postcolony.[30] In this connection, it bears mentioning that the ROK state has yet to award an Order of Merit to a female Korean patriot; the thirty

awarded to Korean figures have gone to male independence fighters and political figures from the colonial and post-Liberation eras.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The four chapters in part 1 center on premodern Korea. They mostly discuss the discourse on honorable death and martyrdom in Chosŏn society. Jungwon Kim's chapter revisits the writings of male literati on women's chaste suicide in late Chosŏn Korea, asking how women's acts of violence, performed in the name of the chastity ideal, were received and sanctioned by the Confucian literati. She takes chaste-women records as crucial textual sites in which Confucian scholars reconfigured political spheres that embodied chaste martyrdom as symbols of their moral integrity and political virtue. Seeing that sincerity (*sŏng*, 誠) served not only as an impetus for human action (committing suicide) but also as a motivator of such historical events (honoring chaste suicide), this chapter argues that the ideal of yŏl, which had been foregrounded in women's chastity, was both shaped by the shifting political culture of the time and engrained within the commemorative space in Chosŏn society.[31] Continuing our deliberation over how the society judges and commemorates meaningful deaths in premodern Korea, Ho Kim's chapter discusses the politics of "virtuous sacrifice" and martyrdom in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Korea. Analyzing Chŏng Yagyong (1762–1836)'s writings on "righteous killing" (*ŭisal*, 義殺), Ho Kim examines how the discourse on "virtuous sacrifice" risked muddling the distinction between violence as moral action and illegitimate violence as the late Chosŏn society witnessed the overflow of violence committed in the guise of such glorious "sacrifice." The chapter complicates the ambiguous boundary between authenticity and falsity in virtuous sacrifice outlined by the late Chosŏn intellectuals—debates that had dominated both the Chosŏn court and the scholarly writings of that time.

Shifting to the end of the Chosŏn period, George Kallander's chapter explores the martyrdom and the deification of Tonghak religious leaders Ch'oe Cheu (1824–60) and Ch'oe Sihyŏng (1827–98). In the context of this struggle against government persecution, competition among Catholic and Protestants groups, and in the aftermath of the failed 1894 Tonghak rebellion,

religious followers in the 1880s and 1890s continuously reshaped the images of these leaders. Kallander shows that, rather than controlling Tonghak, government execution turned these leaders into martyrs that the community then used successfully to attract followers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Closing the premodern section, Franklin Rausch's chapter examines voluntary martyrdom in the Catholic Church during the last phase of Chosŏn Korea. Unlike traditional Confucian understandings of honorable death, such as the suicide of officials as a protest or of women who killed themselves to follow their dead husbands, a martyr's death could not come by his or her own hand, as Catholics were forbidden from killing themselves. Yet, as revealed in this chapter, would-be Catholic martyrs were able to initiate and shape the violence that the state directed at them and that martyrdom, both as an act performed and narrated by others, challenged the Chosŏn state and the values it safeguarded.

Part 2 explores the transition from the colonial era to the postcolonial era in South Korea with a focus on changing constructions of sacrifice and martyrdom. In particular, it attends to the effects that the overturn of the colonial government and the founding of the ROK had on statist and intellectual discourse on patriotic death. In his chapter, Serk-Bae Suh examines the false martyrdom of pioneering modern novelist Yi Kwangsu. After Liberation in 1945, Yi attempted to justify his active participation in Japanese mobilization efforts during the final years of the Asia-Pacific War by claiming that his collaboration constituted the sacrifice of his own good name as a Korean nationalist. Yi explained that he had intended to use his standing as an elite intellectual to contribute to bettering the status of Koreans as colonized subjects within Japanese imperial society. His retrospective twisting of the ideal of nationalist martyrdom obfuscated his own central role in sacrificing the lives of young Korean lives for the imperial war effort, as Suh cogently argues. Yerim Kim, in her chapter, turns her attention to literary work related to the student soldiers who risked their lives to serve in the Japanese military before 1945. Kim reveals that the complexities and contradictions inherent in Korean soldiers' recruitment for and service in the imperial war were, in large part, effaced in early South Korean fiction. Simplistically, post-Liberation narratives represented the student soldiers of the late 1930s and 1940s as authentic symbols of the reborn nation by emphasizing their hardship and courage—and their ultimate loyalty to Korea.[32] In the late 1950s, the writer

Sŏnu Hwi (1922–86) transposed these patriotic narratives to the Korean War and, in the process, incorporated a pronounced Cold War orientation that prefigured the emergence of the anticommunist ROK fighting men of the subsequent decade.

Part 3 examines the role of martyrdom in the interlinked democracy and labor movements during the final three decades of the twentieth century. As noted above, Chun Tae-il's 1970 self-immolation established the central place of martyrdom in South Korea's antiauthoritarian protest culture. In her chapter, Hwasook Nam engages in a historically contextualized analysis of Chun's life and death in order to bring to light his involvement as a worker-intellectual who was part of an inchoate network of worker-intellectuals. As Chun and his fellow activists addressed the contradictions and inequities of rapid, state-led industrialization, they hoped to see the installation of a humane and egalitarian socioeconomic system and, in doing so, offered a radical critique of South Korea's capitalist democracy. Nam contrasts her analysis of Chun as an organic intellectual, whose views took shape in concert with other activist workers around him, with the prevailing memory of Chun as set forth in Cho Yŏngnae's (1947–90) *Chŏn T'aeil p'yŏngjŏn* (A critical biography of Chun Tae-il).[33] Cho's widely circulated text largely omits the relevance of this formative context by narrating the worker-intellectual's self-immolation as the exceptional act of a lone, self-taught labor activist. The production of this simplified memory, Nam contends, was grounded in the particular concerns of university-based and other educated activists and, thus, for the most part, elided the position of Chun and his worker-intellectual cohort within the longer current of South Korean labor activism that extended back to the 1950s. She also suggests that Cho's biography may have inadvertently set the stage for the proliferation of self-immolation in the 1980s and the 1990s. The startling increase in the incidence of protest suicides is the focus of the next three chapters.

Sun-Chul Kim begins chapter 8 by establishing that Chun's death carved out a new space for suicide protest within South Korea's expanding culture of protest. Kim centers his work on the question of why the frequency of self-immolation actually increased amidst the political liberalization of 1986–91. In particular, following the democratic transition of June 1987, at least sixty-eight activists offered up their own lives as self-willed martyrs. This alarming trend pushed back against post-1987 collusion within the political and eco-

nomic establishment that was designed to slow the process of implementing substantive political and labor reforms. Kim argues that the earlier protest suicides gave rise to subsequent protest suicides during this frustrating juncture: committed activists followed the example of their deceased predecessors, as they resolved to engage in the boldest act of protest at their disposal. Jung-hwan Cheon delves into the culture of protest from a distinct angle by offering an internal perspective on suicide protest before and after June 1987. He posits that there was a "1980s-type dying" wherein the guilt and shame over the untimely death of previous martyrs incited subsequent activists into giving up their own lives in protest of a political-economic status quo supported by the geopolitical interests of the United States.[34] The communitarian ethic of the minjung movement undergirded the sense of collective sympathy that bound surviving activists to those who had lost their lives. After identifying this powerful, historically specific sensibility, Cheon charts the intensification of the politics of martyrdom from the Kwangju Uprising up to the self-immolation of Pak Sŭnghŭi in 1991.

Young Chae Seo's chapter examines the impact of the Kwangju Uprising on the politics of martyrdom from the perspective of literature. By exploring the work of novelist Im Ch'ŏru (b. 1954) and other writers, Seo documents the emergence and subsequent evolution of an ethical subject in literary works dealing with the 1980 Kwangju event. Similar to Cheon, Seo centers on the senses of guilt and of indebtedness that racked surviving activists who had not protested to the death in Kwangju. Seo reveals that in the writing of texts—just as in the actual playing out of the social movement of the 1980s—protestors and intellectuals were caught in between "the space between two deaths," by which he means the loss of earlier comrades and the impending loss of further lives.[35] Survivors defined ethical action based on their understanding of how they might begin to recompense the dead, whether by relinquishing their own grasp on life or by devoting themselves to forming accurate memories of what happened in Kwangju and in other tragic cases of state violence against civilians. In doing so, Seo points up the relationship between this guilt-inspired ethical subject that had taken form in the 1980s and earlier Korean writers, such as Yi Kwangsu and Ch'oe Inhun (b. 1936). In this volume's final chapter, Youngju Ryu scrutinizes the political apostasy of former dissident intellectual Kim Chiha. Kim, a victim of state violence who had himself been sentenced to death in the 1970s, made his abrupt political

turn in 1991, when he publicly denounced the marked increase in suicide protests in the early post-democratic transition years. Ryu uncovers the intellectual and biographical factors behind Kim's disheartening disavowal of progressive activists' efforts to maintain the momentum of the reform movement. She also brings to light the relevance of Kim's switch to conservative politics to the bifurcated political field of twenty-first century South Korea.

NOTES

1. Pointing to three contributing factors in modern society—deprived life, love affairs, and unstable family systems—the author concludes that resentment and indignation generated by these factors have led to the increased number of suicides. "Chasal ŭi wŏnin ŭn hyŏndae munmyŏng" [Modern civilization: The source of suicide].

2. Young-ha Kim, "South Korea's Struggle with Suicide."

3. "Chasal ŭi wŏnin ŭn hyŏndae munmyŏng."

4. Nan Kim, "Candlelight and the Yellow Ribbon."

5. Previously, the suicide of former President Roh Moo-hyun (2009) and the unfortunate death of farmer and activist Paek Namgi, from injuries sustained in a 2015 demonstration, had sparked public outcry; however, neither death was instrumental in bringing about an activist milestone.

6. Kim Pusik, *Samguk Sagi*, 41: 6a; and Heonik Kwŏn, "The Democratic Family," 42.

7. *Koryŏsa*, 42: 16a. Another use of the term "yŏlsa" is found in a biography of Sin U (King U, r. 1374–88), which the Ming Chinese official Chu T'ak asked be added to honor Sin U. See *Koryosa*, 135:44b.

8. Koon-piu Ho, "Should We Die as Martyrs to the Ming Cause?," 131.

9. "Yŏl-lyŏ" and "yŏl-lam" are compound words. I have inserted hyphens here to highlight the gender-specific notions of these words.

10. JaHyun Kim Haboush, "Dead Bodies in the Postwar Discourse of Identity in Seventeenth-Century Korea," 415–42.

11. Henry H. Em, *The Great Enterprise, Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea*, 202n111 and 205n123.

12. On the emergence of modern Korean nationalism, see Henry H. Em, *The Great Enterprise*; Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895–1919*; and Vladimir Tikhonov, *Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea*.

13. Yi Hyŏnhŭi, "Yun Ponggil ŭisa Sanghae ŭigŏ ŭi yŏksasŏng" [The historicity of patriotic martyr Yun Ponggil's noble deed in Shanghai], 165–70.

14. Henry H. Em, "Minjok as a Modern and Democratic Construct," 438–39n16; and Jacqueline Pak, "Cradle of the Covenant," 122.

15. Brandon Palmer, *Fighting for the Enemy*, 3.

16. Quoted in Brandon Palmer, *Fighting for the Enemy*, 54–55.

17. Carter J. Eckert, *Park Chung Hee and Modern Korea*; and Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire*.

18. Brandon Palmer, *Fighting for the Enemy*, 60–70.

19. *The Republic of Korea: Its Constitution and Government Organization Law*.

20. Keith Pratt, *Everlasting Flower*, 218.

21. "Chŏngbu surip chŏnhu: 50-yŏndae ŭi kinyŏmbi wa tongsang." [Circa the establishment of the South Korean government: Monuments and statues of the 1950s].

22. Toward the end of Chosŏn Dynasty, a dramatic number of requests to honor virtuous family members were submitted, including many for those who had died hundreds of years ago during the Imjin War and Manchu Invasions.

23. See Charles R. Kim, *Youth for Nation*.

24. Throughout this book, the term "self-immolation" refers specifically to a suicide protest in which the cause of death was burning.

25. See Donald N. Clark, *The Kwangju Uprising*; Linda Sue Lewis, *Laying Claim to the Memory of May*; and Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang, eds., *Contentious Kwangju*.

26. On the massacre of Korean civilians in the 1940s, see Heonik Kwon, "The Democratic Family," 101–17; John Merrill, "The Cheju-do Rebellion," 139–97; and Su-kyoung Hwang, *Korea's Grievous War*.

27. Namhee Lee, *The Making of* Minjung.

28. The term is Vladimir Tikhonov's. See Vladimir Tikhonov, *Social Darwinism*.

29. Chŏng Chonghyŏn, "Yu Kwansun p'yosang ŭi ch'angch'ul kwa chŏnsŭng: Haebang ihu chejak toen Yu Kwansun yŏnghwa ŭi naerŏt'ibŭ rŭl chungsim ŭro" [The creation and transmission of the Yu Kwansun emblem: With a focus on the post-Liberation Yu Kwansun film narrative], 187–88.

30. Seungsook Moon, "Begetting the Nation," 33–66.

31. Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History," 842; and Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*.

32. Yerim Kim, "The Political Dynamics of Sacrifice and the Sacrificial Narrative in Modern Korea."

33. Hwasook Nam, "Reading Chun Tae-il."

34. Jung-hwan Cheon, "Untimely Death and Martyrdom after May 1980," 191–208.

35. Young Chae Seo, "The Birth of an Ethical Subject," 209–227.

PART I

Changing Practices During the Late Chosŏn Era

1

Yŏl (烈): Chaste Martyrdom and Literati Writing in Late Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910)

JUNGWON KIM

> Madam Yang, who had taken care of her ill husband without sleeping and eating, pledged to follow her deceased husband into the ground when he died. [First,] she swallowed poisonous herbs, in vain. Stabbing her neck with a knife, she was then thwarted by family members. However, right before the burial of [her] husband's body, she managed to hang herself and finally died. She was thirty-seven years old and was buried with her husband.[1]

In the long history of Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910), abundant stories and biographies of chaste women depict their formidable determination to follow their deceased husbands into death. Like Madam Yang, if their first attempt to die failed, these women continued to seek other ways to kill themselves even when their families sought to prevent them from doing so. Like many other women who followed deceased husbands to the grave throughout the dynasty, Madam Yang was honored posthumously by the government as a "chaste wife" (*yŏlbu*) who exemplified the utmost Confucian virtue required of women. A memorial arch was erected, and the details of her death, along with her commendable life as well as family background, were eloquently recorded by the hands of male literati. Yi Chun (1560–1635), a Confucian scholar and the author of Madam Yang's biography, was moved by her commitment and speculated about the motivation behind her death with these words: "Perhaps [she] was inspired by her family's [moral] instruction since she was from an illustrious family and her husband was a son of a Confucian scholar, [Kim] Hong Min (1540–94). Or was it her inborn personality of uprightness and determination?"[2]

Madam Yang's biography is regarded as the first one recording the case of a wife following a husband who had died of illness. Of course, not all women who were officially recognized for their virtue chose death as the expression of their commitment. Some widows kept marital fidelity while remaining alive (known as *sujŏl* or *suŭi*), whereas others kept it by dying (*sunjŏl* or *sunjong*)—whether by immediately killing themselves or by means of deferred suicide. Although records celebrating widows' continuing fidelity appeared prior to the Chosŏn period, it was only after the establishment of the Chosŏn state that the practice of chastity became gradually popularized as a consequence of the government's legal, political, and moral sanctions to control female sexuality, such as the law concerning remarriage.[3] In addition to publication and dissemination of didactic texts highlighting the ideal of chastity, various official reward programs accelerated adoption of the ideal among the female population. Moreover, the prolonged turmoil of the Imjin War (1592–98) and the Manchu Invasions (1627, 1637) generated a long list of women who were recognized for defending their sexual integrity to the death from attacks by invading soldiers. Scholars have noted that the Chosŏn state, with enthusiastic support from the ruling elites, endeavored to rebuild and stabilize postwar Korean society by invoking the chastity ideology.[4]

With the large number of women in need of being honored, Chosŏn society was soon awash in writings on their extraordinary actions brushed by Confucian literati. This massive production of chaste women's biographies and eulogies in the second half of the dynasty is conventionally viewed as an outgrowth of the Confucian literati's obsession with reinforcing the patriarchal order, and the recurring trope of chaste-women stories certainly reflects such anxieties. Also, the authors of chaste women's biographies often made it clear that they were taking up their brushes so as to inspire people with virtuous stories. Inscribed by the hands of male literati, these stories are therefore generally regarded as blindly glorifying the women's heroic actions while obscuring the voices and emotions behind their radical choices. However, these records do not consist solely of monolithic tales acclaiming their subjects' remarkable virtue. It is true that male writings on chaste women hardly disclose a complex set of motives and emotions engrained in the chastity ideal, but taking them as one unified discourse equally obfuscates multiple agendas and motivations that, in fact, vary from one text to another. Beneath their formulaic language and rhetoric, these narratives also articu-

late—in their critique of political morality—the symbolic power of women's deaths for the sake of the ideal of *yŏl*, or chastity.[5]

Departing from the conventional approach to chaste-women records, this chapter explores the concept of yŏl as manifested, contested, and shifted in the various writings of male literati on chaste suicide in late Chosŏn Korea. Whether composed individually or on behalf of a collective voice, I take these records as critical accounts in which Confucian scholars reconfigured political spaces that embodied chaste suicide as a political moral symbol. A careful revisiting of writings on—and reactions to—widows' suicides not only explains why Confucian men committed themselves to the ideal of chastity but elucidates the rationale behind widows killing themselves, which was legitimized in the name of chastity despite the fact that suicide violates the very core of another Confucian more—filial piety.[6] Delving into these questions sheds light on one of the key inquiries this volume addresses—that is, what constituted an honorable death, or martyrdom, and how the meaning of yŏl has shifted over historical time. As we will see, the ideal of yŏl that was foregrounded in women's chastity was both shaped by the political culture of the time and entrenched within the commemorative space in Chosŏn society.

YŎL AND THE DISCOURSE OF FEMALE CHASTITY

Having been linked to the actions of and the discourse on martyrdom in Korean history, the word "yŏl" (Ch. *lie* 烈, to be chaste or fierce) is hard to capture in a single definitive term. Historically, yŏl has been used to describe people such as *yŏllyŏ* (烈女 chaste women) and *yŏlsa* (烈士 chaste martyrs) who voluntarily harm or sacrifice themselves in pursuit of an ideal or virtue that they aspire to. The notion of yŏl thus occupies the same space as that shared by violence, self-sacrifice, passion, honor, and virtue. Moreover, whereas a chaste martyr could be anyone, regardless of gender, a chaste woman referred to a woman of fidelity, indicating the exclusive connection between the ideal of yŏl and female sexuality. In Confucian morality, "yŏl" is normally defined as the wifely virtue that was interwoven with and parallel to political loyalty (*ch'ung*). As Confucian scholars made explicit, a wife's fidelity to her husband was juxtaposed with male loyalty to the state; hence the notion of female chastity was sophisticated and politicized throughout the Chosŏn era, especially in times of political disorder.

Not long after the conclusion of the devastating Imjin War in 1617 the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to* (The illustrations of the new edition to the conduct of the three bonds) was compiled by the Chosŏn government, complete with 441 cases of chaste women directly related to the war, whereas the names of only fifty-nine loyal subjects are registered therein. Of those 441 women, 437 had perished—or chosen death—while avoiding sexual assault by Japanese soldiers. The government's investment in printing the eighteen volumes of the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to* despite dire postwar economic conditions reflects its pledge to honor deaths that were deemed meaningful.[7] The fruit of the commemorative projects embarked upon by the Chosŏn government, the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to*, with its many records of chaste women's deaths, ultimately became an endorsement of the political legitimation of the state.[8] Given the specific time when this work was published and the shifting criteria of commemoration, the large number of posthumously honored women compared to the much smaller number of male loyal subjects thus reveals that yŏl as female chastity was tantamount to, and permeated by, political moralism in postwar Chosŏn society.

Korea's traumatic war experiences with Japan and the Manchus not only perpetuated commemorative activities in postwar society but also shaped literary production and narratives on the war dead. And because death was powerfully imprinted on the minds of men and women alike who survived the wars and witnessed the fates of their martyrs, the ideal of yŏl became gradually enmeshed with the bodily performance of killing. Although earlier writings on chaste women had hardly embodied death as the ultimate expression of their virtue, physical sacrifice resulting in death began to become more dominant in literature across genres during this period.

The Confucian literati's records of the lives of chaste women coincided with such changes, with the zenith of chastity discourse being reached in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although Confucian scholars had begun writing about chaste women earlier, these two centuries saw an unparalleled number of records on faithful women's lives occupying a strikingly visible place in the collected works of literati (*munjip*), whereas few such records had appeared in the early years of the dynasty. Out of about 165 biographies of chaste women produced during the Chosŏn Dynasty, only six appeared prior to the seventeenth century, with seventy-three being produced in the eighteenth century and sixty-seven in the nineteenth. When other genres or types

of records are included—ranging from eulogies, epitaphs, funerary essays, prefaces, poems, circular letters, and petitions to short and long stories included in the collected works of literati—the numbers are far greater. One Confucian scholar, Sŏng Haeŭng (1760–1839), for instance, left about twenty pieces honoring chaste women in his literary collection.[9] Although the diverse writings on female chastity cannot be classified into a single genre, the bulk of them are in the form of a biography (*chŏn*) detailing the life of the woman concerned.[10] In these works, as in the account of Madam Yang's suicide quoted at the outset of this chapter, most of the women who are profiled are depicted as martyrs and heroines of marital loyalty. At the same time, these writings by male elites reveal their own ideological perspectives in defense of the violent choices made by women, while dramatizing the metaphorical power of chaste suicide in Confucian morality.

WRITING CHASTE SUICIDE AS A POLITICAL STATEMENT

> The righteousness [ŭi] of the past meant giving up one's life to fulfill moral obligations, as a wife serving a husband and as a subject serving a king. Strangely, in these days those serving a king enjoy wealth and fame by receiving a stipend while the king is alive, then betray the king after his death, forgetting the benefits [they had]. This is the case for every man who is only seeking profit. How can such a person uphold integrity upon facing hardship or sacrifice his life by encountering danger? Women are not like this. Suppressing [their grief over] the lamentable deaths of their husbands, [successive generations of] women have continuously killed themselves to follow their deceased husbands. Alas, for those [men] named scholar-officials [*sadaebu*], are you not ashamed when confronted by women? Why has Heaven bestowed the spirit of yŏl on women alone, and not on the so-called scholar-officials? The reason I always record incidents of chaste women, by composing biographies, is to remind the subjects in the world of their shameful status in forgetting the grace of the king.[11]

Why did individual writings on chaste women thrive more in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than immediately after the Imjin War and Manchu Invasions, and what motivated so many male literati to describe women in

such a dramatic fashion? Kim Yagyŏn (1720–1802), an eighteenth-century Confucian scholar, criticizes the loss of morality and the spirit of the past among his contemporary scholar-officials in the excerpt above from his biography of the chaste wife Madam Kim. Upon the death of her ill husband, Madam Kim told her parents of her decision to die, took care of her husband's funeral, committed suicide, and was buried with her husband in the same grave, as she had wished. Honored as a chaste wife (*yŏlbu*) who had fulfilled the supreme Confucian virtue required of women, Madam Kim's determination to die and her extraordinarily virtuous life path were powerfully recorded by the literatus Kim Yagyŏn.

What distinguishes Kim Yagyŏn's commemoration of Madam Kim from typical biographical records of chaste women is, however, his reflection on the morality of the scholars of his time. In a lengthy preface to the biography, Kim laments the fact that the ideal of yŏl is hardly upheld by his contemporary male scholar-officials. Taking loyalty and chastity to be gendered and interlocking, Kim understands that the ideal of yŏl is entrenched equally within the moral realms of men and women. Further, seeing both loyalty and chastity as embedded in "righteousness," he endorses the idea that the moral obligation of chastity should be performed through one's physical sacrifice. Kim Yagyŏn's preface makes it clear that he is not highlighting the astounding degree of heroic action displayed by Madam Kim as an ordinary wife simply to celebrate her fidelity but to disparage the decline of moralism among his fellow scholar-officials. His goal in writing Madam Kim's story thus appears to be to retrieve and revive the morality that has been lost within the eighteenth-century Chosŏn political sphere.

A rather unknown scholar, Kim Yagyŏn passed the civil service examination in 1774, at the age of forty-five.[12] Two years later, King Chŏngjo (r. 1776–1800) succeeded King Yŏngjo (r. 1724–76), whose reign had witnessed the disturbing Imo Incident of 1762. Despite King Yŏngjo's efforts to establish a Confucian sage–kingship, his action of putting to death his own son and only heir, Crown Prince Sado (1735–62), marked one of the most tragic chapters in Chosŏn history and had a powerful lingering effect on the political realm of eighteenth-century Korea.[13] In the same year that King Chŏngjo, a son of Crown Prince Sado, took the throne, the Confucian scholar Yi Ŭngwŏn (?–?) submitted a memorial requesting the punishment of those who had plotted the Imo Incident and eventually prompted the death of the crown prince.

Taking this memorial to be disloyal to his predecessor King Yŏngjo and rebellious to the state, Chŏngjo ordered Yi's execution.[14] Ironically, Yi's trial also led Kim Yagyŏn into exile because during it he was noted as having sympathized with Yi's position of punishing the plotters of the Imo Incident and the death of crown prince.[15] Although Kim was exempted from exile shortly thereafter, he distanced himself from politics for the rest of his life and devoted himself to writing; Kim Yagyŏn left seven biographies of chaste women in his extensive collected works, including his biography of Madam Kim.[16]

Korean biographical writing tends to limit its scope to its subject's life, highlighting the important deeds that exhibit a specific exemplary virtue. Most biographical records were written to commemorate a literatus's own family members, and many were drafted on behalf of a deceased virtuous woman, usually at the request or commission of her natal or in-law family. Other records were devoted to women completely unknown to the author, as when anecdotes about exceptional non-elite women, already widespread among the people, became the primary sources of the literati's writing. Kim Yagyŏn's seven biographies of chaste women included in his collected works were written after hearing their life stories circulated in his region, Andong of Kyŏngsang Province. In such a process of compilation, biographical records can scarcely capture a full picture of a woman's internal landscape, and the author's message remains didactic. Nevertheless, such biographies were often accompanied by prefaces or postscripts in which literati inscribed their own reflections, as in Kim Yagyŏn's preface to his biography of Madam Kim.

The eighteenth-century Korea through which Kim Yagyŏn lived was an era of dynastic stability under the reigns of Yŏngjo and Chŏngjo. However, as the memorial case that sent Kim into exile shows, strife among political factions had not completely waned. Over the early years of Chŏngjo's reign, the dominant Noron (Old doctrine) faction was further divided—into those who justified King Yŏngjo's killing of Crown Prince Sado (Party of principle, *pyŏkp'a*) and those whose sympathies lay with the crown prince (Party of expediency, *sip'a*)—by means of taking different political positions vis-à-vis the Imo Incident of 1762. Both King Yŏngjo and King Chŏngjo strove to end the factional infighting by implementing the Policy of Impartiality (known as *T'angp'yŏng*) yet eradicating the very roots of conflict was hardly possible.[17] The meaning of political loyalty continued to be contested, and Confucian literati such as Kim Yagyŏn, who held a vision different from that of the

dominant Noron faction, saw this era as morally troubled and decayed. It was during his post-exile period that Kim came across the stories of chaste women whose exceptional deeds put to shame the ethically incapacitated men of his time.

A similar reference to the deficient morality of scholar-officials is found in the postscript to a eulogy to Madam Ch'oe (?–1752) written by Yi Kwangsa (1705–77), who was a contemporary of Kim Yagyŏn. Born into an illustrious lineage as a descendant of the royal family, Yi's father was exiled for his impeachment of four leading political figures in the dominant Noron faction in 1721 and died soon thereafter.[18] Yi was never free of his father's political legacy and spent most of his life in exile. In 1755, he was exiled to Hoeryŏng, in Hamgyŏng Province, for being implicated in a rebellious incident.[19] During his exile in that northern region of the peninsula, Yi called people together and began teaching the illiterate to read and write. Viewing this as potentially treacherous toward the regime, the government charged Yi as an instigator and transferred him to the remote Chin island in the southern tip of Chŏlla Province, where he lived out his days.[20] Despite Yi Kwangsa's posthumous reputation as a scholar and calligrapher, he attained no political prominence during his lifetime. His lengthy exile, however, caused him to concentrate on cultivating his scholarship—a focus that was passed on to his son, Yi Kŭngik (1736–1807), a scholar known for the extensive compilation *Yŏllyŏsil kisul* (Narrative from Yŏllyŏsil).[21]

Yi Kwangsa's eulogy for the chaste wife Ch'oe was written when he had been exiled to Hoeryŏng and heard her suicide story circulated in the town. Madam Ch'oe had been married to a scholar, Kang Yuse, at the age of eighteen, but Kang became ill and died next year. Leaving two letters to her father and her father-in-law, Madam Ch'oe hanged herself one night amid claps of thunder, exactly ten days after the death of her husband. Yi records that "even four days after she died, the blood that drenched her eyes had not disappeared."[22]

At the end of his eulogy, Yi adds a postscript that extols Madam Ch'oe's act as follows:

> Upholding virtue by killing one's own body was difficult to carry out even for exemplary people of the past. As a mere woman residing in a secluded frontier region that offered almost nothing to inspire [people], her inborn nature

> was virtuous and the way she conducted herself perfectly met the moral principle. Her body is gone, [but] her righteous spirit is exposed; her body is light like a feather, [but] her righteousness is heavy like the mountains. [23]

Yi ends by contrasting Madam Ch'oe's integrity with that of

> those decent men with high official titles [who] cultivate their minds and explain philosophical relations by memorizing Confucian works, yet turn away and change face for the smallest interest. Only by learning about such a chaste wife's uprightness could their vicious nature be corrected. This is the yŏl of the chaste wife [*yŏllyŏ chi yŏl*] that could lead to moral influence.[24]

Yi Kwangsa's contrasting of the moral deficiency of the male elites with the moral integrity of a chaste wife was not mere rhetoric on his part. Rather, it stemmed from his conviction that many officials versed in the Confucian classics had failed to fulfill the very core of their moral obligation. Yi Kwangsa himself had lost his wife in the midst of the 1755 political turmoil that led to Yi being denounced as a serious traitor. Believing that her husband would soon be executed, Yi's wife, Madam Yu, had hanged herself while Yi was still being tried. In an epitaph written for his wife, Yi presents her suicide as chaste death (*sunjŏl*) equal in purity to the ideal integrity of scholar-officials.[25] In a corrupt world where moral principles had been disturbed by wicked people betraying each other, Yi praises his wife for carrying out the greatest possible righteousness despite possessing only the meager body of a woman.[26] This accords exactly with Yi's portrayal of Madam Ch'oe's heroic deed and shows that Yi took women's chaste deaths to exist on a moral continuum that extended beyond the simple notion of female chastity. Employing vivid metaphors such as "blood-drenched eyes," "lightning and thunder in the middle of winter," and "skies parted with purplish vigor," Yi highlights these women's moral integrity by dramatizing their courageous physical performance and in doing so alerts his readers of the lost political virtue of the male elites.[27] As a dissident, Yi had little hope of achieving his political vision, yet writing about chaste deaths served as an alternative way to participate in and fulfill his public duty.

The use of women's chaste suicide to critique male literati's flickering moral responsibility only intensified in the chaste-women writings of nine-

teenth-century Korea. Especially when Chosŏn Korea faced a series of external threats, the ideal of yŏl as embodied in chaste suicide was used to put perfidious officials to shame, as seen in the writings of contemporary Neo-Confucian scholars such as Ch'oe Ikhyŏn (1833–1907). Seeing the country as being in grave peril, Ch'oe, in writing to request that the chaste wives Madam Yi and Madam Ha be honored, accentuates that "those [officials] who have turned into beasts and barbarians by being disloyal to the king should feel ashamed when they pass through the memorial arch built for Madam Ha's chaste suicide."[28] Writings on chaste women thus persisted to the end of the dynasty, serving as political indictments of male literati, for they were testaments not merely to wifely fidelity but to the political virtue of loyalty. Never uniformly didactic, these male-literati writings demonstrate shifting rhetoric about, and ideological tensions over, the ideal of yŏl vis-à-vis the political moralism of late Chosŏn Korea.

PERFORMING YŎL: HIERARCHIES OF DYING

> Dying out of indignation is easy; dying quietly is difficult.[29]

As briefly discussed in the previous section, the factional conflicts and diverging interpretations of political issues never ended at the Chosŏn court, despite the relative stability achieved through the Policy of Impartiality. Male elites not only fervently debated issues of political morality but also had begun to incorporate their positions into their writings on chaste suicide—the ultimate manifestation of moral integrity. With the growing participation of male literati in writings on chaste suicide, the question of "which form of dying" should be deemed worthiest took the center stage of scholarly debates starting in the eighteenth century.

In a biography of the chaste woman Madam Yi, Yi Ok (1760–1815) discusses this question. As an iconoclast known for his controversial writings, he concludes the biography with these reflections:

> Alas! From early times, the category of chaste women has not been defined. Most of them, however, displayed impatient behavior. Some stabbed themselves with knives or hairpins; some hung themselves; some starved them-

> selves for seven days; some drowned themselves in water; some poisoned themselves in secret. Only Madam Yi did not follow any of these methods, and is she not exceptional? This is yŏl! Following [her deceased husband] is righteousness [*ŭi*]; keeping her promise is faithfulness [*sin*]; killing herself is sincerity [*sŏng*]. Without possessing these three virtues, how could she possibly have done this? *The Book of Changes* [*I Ching*] notes "painful integrity" [*kojŏl*], and [the death of] Kim's wife [Madam Yi] certainly embodied this expression.[30]

Here the matter of keeping chastity, whether one is alive or dead, is not even questioned. Rather, the focus is on "how to die." In fact, Madam Yi's death came in an amazingly peaceful way, for she entered her room and "lay down, folded her hands over her belly, closed her eyes, and then died."[31] This description may seem to contradict Yi Ok's praise of "painful integrity," since no physical pain is detected in the way Madam Yi prepared for and carried out her death. How could one die as naturally as Madam Yi without employing any external method? Although the biography is silent about this, Madam Yi might have been already ill. Yi Ok writes that, despite wanting to immediately follow her husband into death, Madam Yi found herself pregnant and decided to give birth first. After delivery of a son, she had a female servant feed the baby and continued mourning her deceased husband, scarcely changing her clothes or eating for three years. Yi Ok clearly understands Madam Yi's subsequent quiet, determined death to be far more agonizing than an "impatient" one, for he views the qualities required to accomplish it as having enabled Madam Yi to transcend private emotion. What Yi Ok considers the highest form of dying thus exactly echoes Zhu Xi's dictum, given at the beginning of this section, that "[d]ying out of indignation is easy; dying quietly is difficult."

An emphasis on "dying quietly" became one of the dominant themes in the writings on chaste suicide during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Korea. Zhu Xi's words were frequently quoted in biographical writings, endowing the rhetoric of male literati with added moral authority. Detailing the scene of a woman taking her life, authors devote much attention to her final acts. In most cases, they criticize cases of "immediate death" that were triggered by pressing circumstances such as wars. Sin Kwangsu (1712–75), a scholar renowned for his poetry, makes this point while commemorating the

way that Madam Chŏng followed her husband into death. Giving family members no sign of intending to kill herself, Madam Chŏng was found dead one morning, as if in a deep sleep. Next to her body were a bowl containing poison she had probably drunk and a letter to her brothers; her clothing and a hairpin were carefully stacked on the bedding. Sin opines, "[d]ying [itself] is difficult, yet taking one's life is even more difficult. How could Madam Chŏng sustain herself so calmly? These days, people jump into water, stab their bellies, or hang themselves from beams, wanting to die out of torment and frustration. But they wait to be saved, do not want to die in the end, and cannot attempt to do it again. This is human nature [*injŏng*]."[32]

Interestingly, Sin notes that Madam Chŏng died in 1702, at the age of twenty-nine, about ten years prior to his own birth and some decades before he wrote about her. What was exceptional about Madam Chŏng's death that inspired Sin so many years later? He emphasizes two extraordinary aspects of her suicide: first, her resolution to put her ideal into final action after taking care of her husband's funeral; and second, her attitude of imperturbability (*chongyong*) as she took her own life. Realizing these two difficult tasks, Sin writes, "was truly yŏl!" and moved him to take up his brush.[33] In fact, "dying quietly" requires both unshakable determination and imperturbable action. But why were the male authors of this time obsessed with such performative aspects of suicide, and how did they come to concur with Zhu Xi's statement quoted above, which privileges "dying quietly" (usually some time later) over dying more immediately "out of indignation"?

Ranking dying quietly more highly than dying immediately turns on the issue of how one performs the death. This binary understanding of moral performance is clearly underlined in other literati writings on chaste suicide of that time. For example, in his biography of the chaste wife Madam Yi, Yi Manbu (1664–1732) writes, "[a]ny wife would try to follow a dead husband. Killing [oneself] promptly is usually done out of extreme grief. But as time goes by and the years flow on, it is natural that one's resolution is gradually loosened."[34] Madam Yi, despite her willingness to die instantly after her husband's death, waited for seven years while raising their son. After revealing to her mother her decision to die in order to keep her promise to her husband, Madam Yi finally starved herself to death so as not to disfigure the body she had received from her parents.[35] This is what Yi Manbu acclaims most highly—Madam Yi's unchangeable righteous faithfulness (*ŭiri*), which was

pertinent to political loyalty and yet had been unfortunately lost among the scholar-officials at the Chosŏn court.

The subject of how to die is also linked to the question of how the act of suicide—the very violence demonstrated in chaste death—was legitimized. Existing scholarship agrees that, although both forms of suicide are extreme, "dying immediately" may be understandable, given the degree of a widow's unfathomable despair or sorrow upon her husband's death. Scholars argue, however, that the focus on dying quietly was a consequence of deepening Neo-Confucianism in latter part of dynasty, and thus can be seen only as involuntary suicide enforced by the patriarchal ideology.[36] Of course, performers of chastity had displayed their passion to uphold Confucian virtue through various forms of self-inflicted violence in the past.[37] Yet the shifting political settings in the late Chosŏn not only required deeper reflection on this issue but also placed a mounting emphasis on the demonstration of one's sincere moral pursuit. Especially during the prolonged factional struggles, the notion of "sincerity" (*sŏng*) began to come to the fore in discussions of moral performance. In a broad sense, "sincerity" in Confucianism refers to the utmost action by a human being to achieve the Way (道) of Heaven.[38] Although sincerity had heretofore been seen as a personal matter that fulfilled one's own private moral cultivation, it now became actively incorporated into public and political stakes as a critical part of the moral image of each faction, thus legitimizing one's political position and appeal.

This intellectual development is closely related to Chŏng Yagyong's (1762–1836) careful distinction between authentic and hypocritical deaths, which Kim Ho discusses in detail in his chapter in the present volume. In Madam Yi's biography excerpted above, Yi Ok, a contemporary of Chŏng Yagyong, clearly sees sincerity as the final step in manifesting one's righteousness (*ŭi*) and faithfulness (*sin*) when he writes that "killing herself is sincerity (*sŏng*)." In other words, chaste suicide, as the highest expression of one's virtue, should be performed with a sincere heart and with devotion that is devoid of selfish attachment (*sasim*). As a result, only a death that was embedded in sincerity was given full meaning and validated as an honorable one.

This emphasis on sincerity is even more evident in requests to the government to commemorate chaste suicides, for such requests competed with one another for official selection. Many suicides that were submitted for commemoration under the banner of the chastity ideal were not in fact seen as

authentic or sincere; rather, they were viewed as having been an involuntary response to the conditions of the moment, in complete contrast to a voluntary, measured action carried out in all sincerity. Thus, in a petition drafted on behalf of a Madam Ch'oe, who, like Madam Yu, had engaged in a stubborn rather than "instant" pursuit of the will to die, Wi Paekkyu (1727–98), an eminent scholar in the Chŏlla region, requests public recognition of Madam Ch'oe's heroic suicide—a suicide which, he writes, is also vindicated under the ranking of "dying quietly" and was thus performed with the greatest sincerity.[39] Distinguishing her death from a "perfunctory" one, Wi stresses that Madam Ch'oe's act was a genuine assertion of virtue. How, then, did the male literati come to take sincerity to be the ultimate criterion of chaste martyrdom?

In 1711, when the suicide of the chaste wife Madam Yu became known to people of her town of Koyang, in Kyŏnggi Province, a petition to honor her death was submitted to the local government over the names of about fifty local Confucian scholars. After her husband's death, Madam Yu hardly ate meals for more than five years and finally starved herself to death. The petition states that Madam Yu used to say that she would gladly die; at the same time, however, she did not dare harm her body herself because doing so would go against filiality.[40] The petition underlines that the painfully extended period over which she starved herself rendered her commitment to die exceptionally sincere. It also notes that, had Madam Yu been born a man, she would have remained a loyal subject with moral integrity at this time of political disturbances. In sum, the petition claims that it was the sincerity of her suicide that inspired people, brought local Confucian scholars together, and finally generated the public consensus (*kongnon*) that led to the petition being submitted.[41]

The women profiled in the countless accounts of chaste suicide could not, of course, tell their own stories or prove their deaths to have been sincere rather than merely impulsive; instead, the value of their deaths could be assessed only by people who were still alive. What was it that led to public consensus as to the sincerity a given chaste suicide, and thence to a petition seeking public recognition? In debates over what was righteous versus hypocritical action, the sincerity of a given woman's suicide was corroborated only when people agreed on it through the mass support of their unified feelings, for people are collectively "linked to action, and they bring shared values into

the domain where people construct emotions, make sense of them and finally use them."[42] In such a context, it may be helpful to consider sincerity not simply as a criterion validating women's chaste suicide but as the sociopolitical dimension of emotions or collective feelings that were tied in the late Chosŏn to historical conditions such as the political ideology and culture among literati.[43] A close reading of the motives veiled within literati writings on chastity therefore reveals the shared value of sincerity impelled people to unite behind Confucian officials' endeavors to honor chaste suicide in Chosŏn society. We can also see how male literati connected the notion of sincerity to the unparalleled component of unwavering moral commitment, thus reflecting the ultimate political virtue of that time.

CONCLUSION

During the Chosŏn Dynasty, numerous women were commemorated for their lifelong fidelity to a deceased husband (or fiancé, in some cases). Collectively referred to as chaste women, many kept celibacy as widows and did not remarry, while others took the extreme path of killing themselves to follow their husbands in death. In particular, the shattering wars with Japan and the Manchus in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries ushered in an era of martyrdom in which large numbers of women were honored for choosing heroic death in defense of their sexual dignity. The result was that postwar Korean society entered a new mode of commemorative culture and extreme behavior in which killing oneself became highly honored.

Scholars consider the immediate postwar era to be a watershed period that departed from the earlier discourse on female chastity with the state's active recognition of martyrs through various commemorations of their extraordinary actions. As a crucial means of restoring postwar society, publication of biographical writings on chaste women was promoted at both the state and local levels. In addition to printing didactic books that included a large selection of stories of exemplary women recognized by the Chosŏn state, male literati participated in their own way by inscribing women's virtuous acts and, especially, their chaste suicides. The following centuries then saw a shifting discourse on the meaning of chastity as biographical writings began to serve as a vital textual site where scholars called for moral cultivation by analyzing the motives and methods of women's chaste deaths.

Although it has been assumed that biographical records of chaste women only reflect their male authors' ideological agendas, which were tied to the Confucian patriarchy, alternative reading of these writings discloses some of the complex emotions and tensions generated by the political morality of the time. Chaste action in the form of female suicide was accorded the same value as male loyalty to the state. This time-honored juxtaposition had long existed, yet the ideal of yŏl that was ingrained in chastity became even more politically salient in the literati writings of eighteenth-century Korea. In the face of the unrelenting political disarray brought about by factional struggles at the late Chosŏn court, tales of chaste suicide served as a contentious forum where the moral integrity of scholar-officials was put to the test. Often bemoaning the decadence of elite men "who talked about righteous faithfulness all the time, yet were easily blinded by seeking immediate gains overnight," male authors passionately exploited the moral symbol of chaste suicide in an attempt to put unrighteous Confucian scholar-officials to shame.[44]

Moreover, with the recurring theme of "how to die" dominating a powerful narrative that established a hierarchy in the forms of death, dying itself was no longer the most crucial single element of virtuous suicide. Not only did male literati's writings prioritize dying quietly over dying immediately in the performance of chaste suicide, but the matter of sincerity began to influence both the rationales for honorable death and those for the violence of killing. Sincerity as an authentic expression of the active pursuit of morality also functioned as a critical impetus for collective actions to honor chaste suicide, as displayed in petitions submitted by Confucian male scholars. In sum, the ideal of yŏl evolved throughout the Chosŏn Dynasty, in response to various external and sociopolitical stimuli that legitimized an individual's bodily action of committing suicide as an act of unshakable devotion. As the lines defining whose death would be deemed sincere and who could be commemorated as a public martyr continued to be politicized and redrawn over time, the ideal of yŏl also departed from the earlier uniform discourse on normative Confucian gender relations.

NOTES

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1. Yi Chun, "Yang yŏlbujŏn" [Biography of Madam Yang] 64: 463b. Although no birth or death date is available for Madam Yang, as the wife of the scholar-official Kim Hŏn (?–?), who was a son of Kim Hongmin (1540–94), we know that she lived sometime during the late sixteenth century.

2. Ibid.

3. In 1485, a regulation on remarriage was legalized as follows: "Those who had guilt, sons of corrupt officials, sons and grandsons of remarried or unfaithful women, and sons of concubines are not permitted to take the civil service exam." *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* [The great code of administration] 3:1b.

4. See Kang Myŏnggwan, *Yŏllyŏ ŭi t'ansaeng* [The birth of chaste women]; Sook-in Lee, "The Imjin War and the Official Discourse of Chastity"; Michel J. Pettid, "Fashioning Womanly Confucian Virtue"; and Hŏ Namrin, "Yŏllyŏ tamnon kwa imjin waeran" [Chaste women discourse and the Imjin War].

5. Wejing Lu, "Faithful Maiden Biographies"; and Wei Hua, "From Private Life to Public Performances."

6. Although harming one's body was against the core value of Confucian filiality, as proscribed in the *Xiaojing* [Classic of filial piety], various acts of self-inflicted violence, such as flesh sacrifice, were widely practiced as forms of filial devotion. For a study of this subject from the aspect of Chinese religious life, see Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence in Chinese Religions*, 62–88.

7. *Kwanghaegun ilgi* [Diary of Kwanghae reign] 39 [1617/3/11]. For the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* [Veritable records of the kings of the Chosŏn Dynasty], I used the online database provided by the National Institute of Korean History (Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe) at http:sillok.history.go.kr/main/main.jsp. All references to this record are followed by the date in this form: the *Sillok* of each king, volume number [year, month, and day]. The *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to* includes a total of 719 women in the "Chaste Women Section," of which 533 cases come from King Sŏnjo's reign (r. 1567–1608). See Hŏ Namrin, "Yŏllyŏ tamnon kwa imjin waeran."

8. JaHyun Kim Haboush, "Dead Bodies in the Postwar Discourse of Identity in Seventeenth-Century Korea."

9. Sŏng Haeŭng, *Yŏn'gyŏngjae chŏnjip* [Collected works of Yŏn'gŏngjae].

10. In this chapter, I use the terms "biographical records" or "biographical writings" to represent the wide variety of biographical materials just listed above. See Joan Judge and Hu Ying eds., *Beyond Exemplar Tales*, "Introduction," 4–5.

11. Kim Yagyŏn, "Kim yŏllyŏjŏn" [A biography of chaste woman Kim] 91: 598a.

12. Kim Yagyŏn, "Haengjang" [Biography] 91: 685a.

13. The Imo Incident of 1762 refers to death of Crown Prince Sado by the order of his father King Yŏngjo. Factors that led to this shocking incident were politically com-

plex and sensitive as illustrated in many studies. For English scholarship, see JaHyun Kim Haboush, *The Confucian Kingship in Korea*.

14. Yi Ŭngwŏn and his father Yi Tohyŏn were executed, and their hometown, Andong, was demoted from the status of *pu* 府 (special city) to *hyŏn* 縣 (lesser prefecture). *Chŏngjo sillok* [Veritable record of King Chŏngjo] 2 [1776/8/6; 1776/8/19]. In 1899, Yi Ŭngwŏn's descendants petitioned to restore the honor of both Yi and his father, who were then granted posthumous titles by King Kojong (r. 1863–1907). *Kojong sillok* [Veritable record of King Kojong] 39 [1899/11/10; 1899/11/11].

15. When Kim Yagyŏn's name was mentioned during Yi Ŭngwŏn's trial, the court officials claimed that Kim should be punished. However, King Chŏngjo did not agree. *Chŏngjo sillok* 2 [1776/8/19]. It seems that Kim Yagyŏn was eventually sentenced to death, but that his punishment was reduced to exile. *Chŏngjo sillok* 3 [1777/1/15].

16. When Kim Yagyŏn was included in the list of those who were to receive special release, officials memorialized against King Chŏngjo's decision. However, King Chŏngjo did not reverse his order. *Chŏngjo sillok* 3 [1777/1/16]. Kim Yagyŏn, *Tuamjip* [Collected works of Tuam].

17. Along with some members of the Noron faction, the *sip'a* (party of expediency) was comprised of members of the Soron (Young doctrine) and Namin (Southerners) factions. There is a long list of Korean scholarship on the factional divisions in late Chosŏn politics, as well as on the Policy of Impartiality put forward by kings Yŏngjo and Chŏngjo. For a representative English work on King Yŏngjo, who implemented the policy, see JaHyun Kim Haboush, *The Confucian Kingship in Korea*.

18. *Yŏngjo sillok* [Veritable record of King Yŏngjo] 69 [1725/1/5; 1725/6/25].

19. *Yŏngjo sillok* 83 [1755/3/30]. This incident consisted of a treasonous poster being anonymously put up on the tavern wall in Naju City of Chŏlla Province, hinting at King Yŏngjo's regicide of his stepbrother, the previous King Kyŏngjong (r. 1720–24). Composed by political figures of the Soron faction, the poster targeted members of the opposite Noron faction as disloyal subjects who had harmed the political morality at the court. The incident enraged King Yŏngjo and prompted a purge of the Soron faction. See JaHyun Kim Haboush, *The Confucian Kingship in Korea*, 188–90. After being interrogated by the king himself, Yi was punished with being exiled to a location 3,000 *li* from the capital.

20. *Yŏngjo sillok* 100 [1762/7/25].

21. Yi Kŭngik's *Yŏllyŏsil kisul* [Narrative from Yŏllyŏsil] is a general history of Chosŏn from 1392 to 1720, compiled chronologically, including materials from memorials, biographies, diaries, letters, memoirs, anecdotes, and the collected works of other authors.

22. Yi Kwangsa, "Ch'oe yŏlbu ch'an" [A eulogy for chaste wife Ch'oe] 221: 539c. In addition to this eulogy, Yi Kwangsa left another piece, titled "Ch'oe yŏlbu aesa" [A sor-

rowful writing for chaste wife Madam Ch'oe] to commemorate Madam Ch'oe's suicide, see 221: 540a.

23. Yi Kwangsa, "Ch'oe yŏlbu ch'an" 221: 539c.

24. Ibid.

25. Yi Kwangsa, "Mangsil yuin Munhwa Yu-ssi myojimyŏng" [An epitaph for my deceased wife Madam Yu of Munhwa] 221: 552a. Along with this epitaph, Yi left two funeral orations honoring his wife Madam Yu's death.

26. Ibid.

27. Yi notes that it was strange to have "lightning and thunder in the middle of winter, which looked like the skies being parted and opened with purplish vigor cast over [Heaven]." Yi Kwangsa, "Ch'oe yŏlbu aesa," 221: 540a.

28. For more on Madam Yi, see Ch'oe Ikhyŏn, "Yŏlbu Yi-ssi chŏnyŏgi" [On honoring chaste wife Madam Yi] 325: 490c. The quote can be found in volume 325: 527b.

29. Zhu Xi, *Jinsi lu* [Reflections on things at hand] 10: 44: "感慨殺身者易, 從容就義者難."

30. Yi Ok, "Yŏllyŏ Yi-ssi chon" [Biography of chaste woman Madam Yi].

31. Ibid.

32. Sin Kwangsu, "Chŏng yŏlbujŏn" [Biography of chaste wife Madam Chŏng] 231: 491b. In the title of this biography, Sin wrote the character *bu* (嬪), whereas some modern texts incorrectly transcribe it as *bu* (婦), though both refer to "a wife" in general as a homonym. See Yi Hyesun and Kim Kyŏngmi, eds., *Han'guk ŭi yŏllyŏjŏn* [Chaste women's biographies of Korea], 275; and Kim Nami, comp. and trans., *18-segi yŏsŏng saenghwalsa charyojip* [Sourcebook on history of women's lives in the eighteenth century], 342.

33. Sin Kwangsu, "Chŏng yŏlbujŏn" 231: 491b.

34. Yi Manbu, "Hyoja yŏlbu ch'ungno yŏlchŏn" [Biographies of a filial son, chaste wife, and loyal slave] 178: 432a.

35. According to Yi Manbu's biography, Madam Yi's husband used to tell her that they would die together on the same day, and Madam Yi had promised him that she would do so. Ibid.

36. Chang Yusŭng, "Chosŏn hugi sŏbuk chiyŏk yŏsŏng ŭi chiyŏksŏng" [The locality of women of the northwestern region in the late Chosŏn], 127.

37. Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence in Chinese Religions*; and Sixiang Wang, "The Filial Daughter of Kwaksan."

38. Although it is difficult to translate *sŏng* (誠) into English, I use "sincerity" in this chapter. For an insightful study on the linguistic origin and philosophical evolution of *sŏng* in Confucianism see Yi Ŭnho, "Ingan ŭi chuch'ejŏk chagak ŭrosŏ sŏng ŭi kaenyŏm simhwa" [Deepening the definition of sincerity as human spontaneous self-awareness], 299–31. Yi notes that it was *Zhongyong* (The doctrine of mean; 中庸) which deepened

the notion of *sŏng* to mean *chisŏng* (manifesting sincerity 至誠) by emphasizing a human being's conscious action to attain the Way. I would like to thank a reviewer for suggesting that I delve further into the definition of "sincerity" as discussed in this chapter.

39. Wi Paekkyu, "Ch'ŏngp'o yŏllyŏ Ch'oe-ssi changdae" [Petition written on behalf of the chaste woman Madam Ch'oe] 243: 64a. In general, petitions to honor virtuous deeds were drafted by a scholar with a literary reputation. Integrating collective voices into the petition in the most powerful way possible, the petitions were also signed by as many as hundreds of Confucian literati. See Jungwon Kim, "Deeper than the Death," 167–68.

40. Kim Chingyu, "Ch'ŏng Yu yŏlbu chŏngp'omyŏnju" [Request to honor chaste wife Madam Yu] 174: 103d. An epitaph written by another scholar, Yi Imyŏng, adds that Madam Yu did not dare harm her body "with which she was endowed by her parents." See Yi Imyŏng, "Yuin Yu-ssi mop'yo" [An epitaph for Madam Yu] 172: 350–51.

41. Kim Chingyu, "Ch'ŏng Yu yŏlbu chŏngp'omyŏnju" 174: 103d.

42. Frank Biess, "Forum: History of Emotions," 70–71.

43. Here I borrow the notion of what Barbara H. Rosenwein calls "emotional communities." Rosenwein notes that "the ways those emotions are themselves elicited, felt, and expressed depend on cultural norms as well as individual proclivities." See Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History," 836–37.

44. Hwang Yunsŏk, "Pal yŏlbu Yun-ssi haengnok" [Epilogue to a biography of chaste wife Madam Yun] 246: 48–90.

2

Politics and the Discourse of Virtuous Sacrifice in Late Chosŏn Korea

Chŏng Yagyong's Discussion of Righteous Killing

HO KIM
Translated by SIXIANG WANG

In Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism, the principles of benevolence (*in* 仁), righteousness (*ŭi* 義), propriety (*ye* 禮), and wisdom (*chi* 智) are intrinsic to human nature, both in the sense that they conform to a universal moral principle (*li* 理), and they come into being on their own (*chayŏn* 自然). All human beings, upon their birth, are endowed with a "luminous virtue" (*myŏngdŏk* 明德) consistent with moral principle. And so, it becomes self-evident that human beings would be willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of benevolence and righteousness.

AVENGING WRONGS AND PURGING DISHONOR

Represented by the idea of *yŏl* (烈), this readiness for self-sacrifice means even death can become an afterthought. In Zhu Xi Neo-Confucian terms, *yŏl* can be understood as follows: a sense of justice originating from the shame (*su* 羞) felt toward one's own immorality and disgust (*ak* 惡) toward injustice committed by others. Awareness of the principle of justice (*ŭi* 義) can also move an individual to commit violence against another as vengeance for indignation, that is in an act of "justified killing" (*ŭisal* 義殺) or to even end one's own life. From these ideas emerge a potential legitimation of violence against others and a rationalization of suicide. This rationalization contradicts the Confucian and Mencian notion of "the virtue of loving life" (*hosaeng chi tŏk* 好生之德), while at the same time naturalizes shaming and life-harming practices as long-standing and self-evident to the program of virtue.

In the aftermath of two devastating wars, the late Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910) witnessed the complex elaboration of two opposing moral discourses:

at once enduring shame as a strategy of survival and of viewing death as testimony to one's virtue and resolve. To praise the virtuous sacrifice (ŭiyŏl 義烈) of those who died courageously, instead of exculpating survivors for living in shame, created a certain tension. The more virtuous sacrifice was emphasized, the more aspersion was implied toward those who survived. In this commendation of virtuous sacrifice, the resulting suffering never ends; it continues to torment the survivors until their dishonorable lives end altogether.

For those who had chosen life, they could either passively accept this discourse of virtuous sacrifice, or they could offer active resistance. On the other hand, as an effort to preserve the moral value in their survival, there were those who contended that death was not the sole expression of virtuous sacrifice or questioned the moral authenticity of these acts of virtuous sacrifice. There were those who raised the notion that benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom were not inherent to human nature, which instead was fundamentally reducible to the will to survive. Such apologies from those who survived, especially if they challenged the moral authenticity of the choice of righteous death, risked the total rejection of Zhu Xi's teachings, for which a sense of justice was an intrinsic qualification of human nature.

During the latter half of the seventeenth century, Song Siyŏl (1607–89) decided to eulogize the virtuous sacrifice of the Three Scholars (Hong Ikhan [1586–1637], Yun Chip [1606–37], and O Talche [1609–37]) in response to discussions that called into question the moral authenticity of their martyrdom. Hong, Yun, and O were members of the anti-peace faction who opposed Chosŏn's surrender to the Manchus. When the Manchu Qing Emperor Taizong invaded Chosŏn in 1636, his forces soon surrounded the Namhan fortress, trapping the King Injo (r. 1623–49) and his entourage inside. A fierce debate soon ensued. Ch'oe Myŏnggil (1586–1647) and others in the pro-peace camp advocated for securing a marriage alliance, while Kim Sanghŏn (1570–1652) and others called for armed resistance. After adopting the position of the pro-peace position, King Injo and his entourage surrendered the Namhan fortress and capitulated to the Qing early in 1637. The pro-peace faction singled out Hong Ikhan and the two other leaders of the anti-peace group who were arrested and dispatched to Shenyang in the Qing. Once there, they refused to waver from their anti-peace stance and were subsequently executed.

In 1668, the court discussed establishing a shrine for the Three Scholars. Hŏ Chŏk (1610–80) opposed the move, noting "the Three Scholars ignored the interests of the state and went too far to stir up controversy." He thus criticized them: "even though among them were truly men of virtue and righteousness, a good portion sought no more than to solicit the praise of others."[1] In response, Song Siyŏl composed the *Samhaksa chŏn* (Biographies of the Three Scholars) to counter such attitudes.[2] For Song, rebuking those who had defamed acts of virtuous sacrifice was an act of virtue in its own right. The purpose of Song Siyŏl's *Samhaksa chŏn* was more to acclaim "virtuous sacrifice" than to criticize survival. Nonetheless, the *Samhaksa chŏn*, through its unceasing praise of the Three Scholars' martyrdom, effectively placed "those who remained alive" under one, overarching category. Song Siyŏl was arguing that not dying and remaining alive precluded the expression of virtuous sacrifice. The *Samhaksa chŏn* categorized remaining alive as shameful and took death to be the way to ascend to the altar of virtue. Life and death, shame and honor now emerged as stark oppositional dichotomies. A place for diverse positions and distinctions between these poles now disappeared. Death itself also became the genuineness of virtuous sacrifice, silencing the survivors who now lost the chance to exonerate themselves for living and tolerating the shame of surrender. Now for those who hoped to express righteousness, they could not but choose death. Any insinuation that choosing death might have been intended to solicit renown from the world would have been treated as a severe insult to the dead and an evil attempt to conceal the hypocrisy of the accuser.

THE LATE CHOSŎN QUESTION

Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to (The illustrations of the new edition to the conduct of the three bonds 東國新續三綱行實圖), which had been compiled after the Imjin War and produced by local gazetteers from all around the nation overflowed with accounts of those who died fighting for their country and of women who died to preserve their chastity. While one could find examples that did not involve death, it is difficult to find anything that rejected principled death (*chŏlsa* 節死) as an essential component of virtuous sacrifice.[3] These extreme acts of virtue provided an opportunity for an insignificant

individual to be in unison with the principles of heaven and was the reason why many did not shirk away from death.

In the eighteenth century as well, there was silence on the matter of living while enduring shame. Principled death remained the subject of adulation. The Chosŏn government, which hoped to transform its population according to Confucian precepts, encouraged common people to emulate virtuous behavior, including acts of martyrdom. They, however, over-promoted the notion of righteous death and virtuous sacrifice, with the interpolation of "false" cases the natural result.[4]

In this context, the once repressed discourse regarding the moral authenticity of death reemerged. Chŏng Yagyong (1762–1836) condemned the proliferation of excessive and ignorant actions done in the name of moral principle. As a model for the Chosŏn state to follow, Chŏng pointed to the following regulation from the Qing Dynasty *Libu zeli* (Precedents of the Ministry of Rites): "filial children who harm their own lives by cutting off flesh from their thighs or virtuous widows who suddenly kill themselves when they lose their husbands or when they are not threatened by pressing circumstances shall not be honored with memorials."[5] To Chŏng, insisting that violent acts, such as slicing off flesh from the thigh or the feeding of blood from severed fingers, constituted filial devotion is to see filiality as an essentially gruesome behavior. In his critique, this view represented no authentic moral principle, but a false one. What about virtuous women? Chŏng believed emoluments for chastity of women who committed suicide should also be only disbursed in appropriate circumstances.

Chŏng Yagyong thus described the increasing conflation between ignorant or extreme acts with instances of true virtuous sacrifice. In his view, there were many who concocted facts in order to acquire the honors that came with acts of such sacrifice. In the case of volunteer soldiers who fought during the Imjin War, Chŏng found that "after these centuries, there were now many instances where facts and events had been manufactured for presentation to the court and thus could not be believed outright.[6]

A discourse of virtuous sacrifice that took death to be testament to moral virtue and suppressed any interrogation of the moral authenticity of such deaths now confronted numerous problems in the late eighteenth century. As these virtuous deaths, the objects of eulogy, grew in number, so did the possibility of skepticism regarding their moral authenticity. Ironically, the

increase in these deaths effectively debased the value of virtuous sacrifice. What emerged is the suggestion that death alone cannot automatically represent an act of "virtuous sacrifice." For Chŏng everyday expressions of virtue, such as serving one's in-laws and raising one's children while enduring suffering was better evidence of virtuous sacrifice.

Pak Chiwŏn (1737–1805) agreed with this opinion. In his *Yŏllyŏ Hamyang Pakssijŏn* (Biography of the chaste woman Pak from Hamyang), Pak expressed his regret over the profusion of virtuous deaths and critiqued the conventional practice of commemorating them as moral exemplars.[7] He advocated a view of virtue that found virtuous sacrifice in forbearance, the endurance of suffering in life rather than in a dramatic death. This transformation, from death as a sufficient condition for virtuous sacrifice, to death as no longer being a necessary condition for such judgment, points to another major shift in the discourse: from an emphasis on consequence to one of motivation.

For the moral authenticity of a virtuous death to be recognized, both the motivation and the consequence of the act ought to be considered. The problem with ascertaining the authenticity of motivation was that no one, except the party who had died, could have known it for certain. The deeper one delves into the matter, the more it raises the question whether such moral authenticity was really fundamental to human nature. This issue was a central concern for the Chosŏn Zhu Xi Confucians. With skepticism over both the belief in and the possibility of an objective basis for human nature, one is confronted with a situation where human character can only be ascertained through subjective criteria alone.[8] There is little that prevents skepticism over the motivations for an act of virtuous sacrifice. One could categorically refuse to honor these acts, assuming the immorality of motivation. Or one could accept that motivation cannot be ascertained but still advocate commending the acts of virtuous sacrifice actions as a way to influence the people's aspirations.

Pak Chiwŏn took the latter position. When the moral authenticity of motivation could not be known, an act of virtuous sacrifice should not be categorically dismissed. What results is a compromise whereby the possibility of hypocrisy or false piety had to be accepted to a certain degree. Pak elucidated this notion in his *Myŏngnon* (Discussion of names).[9] Along this line, he proposed incentivizing human desires and sense of shame by luring mankind to goodness with recognition and honor. Of course, such an approach would have been strongly rebuked by a Zhu Xi fundamentalist. If moral action was

encouraged through the incentives of recognition and honor then any moral action could potentially be rooted in ulterior motivation thereby turning everyone into moral cynics. As a result, distinguishing moral authenticity from pretension became impossible. There is a deeper reason for why adherents of Zhu Xi fundamentalism could not accept even a hint of moral cynicism or false piety. They worried that extolling the virtuous sacrifice marked by such cynicism would nurture a skepticism toward the moral human nature that underlay these acts in the first place. Indeed, an increase in skepticism toward the goodness of human nature was an extremely worrisome situation for a Zhu Xi Neo-Confucian ideologue.

Pak Chiwŏn's thinking was different for two reasons. The first was that recognizing even hypocritical or cynical acts of virtuous sacrifice would nonetheless still encourage aspirations for good. The second reason was more fundamental. For Pak, if the increase in the frequency of acts of virtuous sacrifice was accompanied by a growth in skepticism about their moral authenticity, the resulting interrogation of human nature would also broaden the range of possible challenges to the philosophical foundations of Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism. On a certain level, it might have been better to resolve this problem by maintaining a range of tolerance for false piety, but it remains that the toleration of falsehood was incompatible with absolute goodness. In this regard, Pak agreed with the Zhu Xi fundamentalist retort, but treated it as excessive worry. According to Pak, the best form of governance employed techniques that were moral and transparent in purpose, but if one refused on principle to apply the "unavoidable" methods of using human desire for fame and to avoid shame, then government would be impossible. He advocated the flexible utilization of these unavoidable methods.

On the other hand, this compromise raised its own problems. If hypocrisy was permitted because authentic motivation cannot be ascertained, then anyone could be elevated in the name of virtuous sacrifice. For Chŏng Yagyong, the moral authenticity of virtuous sacrifice might have been difficult to judge, but he insisted that one could establish certain necessary conditions—an objective set of criteria—that enabled the determination of authenticity. Throughout his *Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ* (New treatise on diligence in jurisprudence), Chŏng advocated this strategy of compromise. Chŏng, on some level, agreed with the statements of Pak. As such, he did not believe in any sure outward sign of such authenticity, but some standards for recognizing acts of virtuous

sacrifice could nonetheless be established. In a period when skepticism of human motivation and moral human nature had arisen, Chŏng installed himself as a guardian of the moral authenticity of virtuous sacrifice. He had exacting standards for what could be considered virtuous sacrifice, which made it difficult for any act to be eligible. This perspective also permeated Chŏng Yagyong's discussion of righteous killing.

KILLING AS JUSTIFIED VIOLENCE

"Righteous killing," as defined in the *Zhou li* (Rites of Zhou), is when "the killing of a person is justified."[10] In the late eighteenth century, the "Ŭnae chŏn" (Biography of Ŭnae) provides a representative example of a righteous killing.[11] In 1789, a woman named Kim Ŭnae who lived in Kangjin surrendered herself to local authorities after killing an old woman in her village. The old woman had spread rumors that Kim had engaged in illicit sexual relations. Ashamed and aggrieved, Kim sought out the old woman and stabbed her several times with a knife. King Chŏngjo praised Ŭnae's virtuous sacrifice and promulgated her example across the country in order to instruct the subjects of his kingdom. At the time, there was no one who did not consider commending her for her impassioned defense of her chastity.

Several decades later, in the autumn of 1801, Chŏng Yagyong learned more about this affair during his exile to Kangjin. For Ŭnae's act of vengeance to be considered justified, one would first have to demonstrate that she was innocent of adultery. Being a matter of the women's chamber it is not easy to verify whether adultery had occurred. From the rashness with which Ŭnhae murdered the old woman, Chŏng speculated that she must have felt considerable shame and anger. On this basis, he considered the act of violence to be justified as an act of retribution. He drew this conclusion in light of how difficult it was for a woman to clear her name of adultery and left open the possibility for exoneration through retributive violence.

Chŏng Yagyong allowed for someone like Kim Ŭnae to avenge the libels of adultery but treated cases of ordinary insult differently. In 1787, Kim Ch'odong of Pyŏngsan, in Hwanghae Province had mobilized laborers to build an embankment but was insulted by Kim Yŏnsŏk of the same village. Unable to bear the indignation, the two began to fight and Kim Ch'odong fell into the water and died. Members of Kim Ch'odong's family who had wit-

nessed the scene, including his brother Kim K'ŭnnom and his wife, attacked Yŏnsŏk in vengeance and beat him to death.[12]

The crux of the problem was that it was unclear whether the incident should be understood as Kim Ch'odong having killed himself after falling into the river during a fight with Kim Yŏnsŏk or as Kim Yŏnsŏk murdering Kim Ch'odong by pushing him into the water. If understood as a murder, Kim Yŏnsŏk would have been punished with the death penalty, but if not, the extenuating circumstances would have to be reconsidered. This dilemma also raised the question of whether the vengeance Ch'odong's family took on Yŏnsŏk was justified. If Kim Ch'odong had been murdered, his brother Kim K'ŭnnom's act of vengeance would be reconsidered in light of extenuating circumstances. However, if Kim Ch'odong was considered to have committed suicide, the killer of Kim Yŏnsŏk—Kim K'ŭnnom—would be treated as a murderer and put to death.

There is one more point that needs consideration here. If Kim Ch'odong's "suicide" had been a result of "insults by Kim Yŏnsŏk," then Kim Ch'odong's family would have had cause to take vengeance on Kim Yŏnsŏk. As such, Kim K'ŭnnom who had avenged his brother's death would have qualified for commutation in light of extenuating circumstances. If Kim Ch'odong's suicide occurred because of Kim Yŏnsŏk's insults, Kim K'ŭnnom's actions could have been considered a righteous killing because he had killed someone who had insulted one's father or elder brothers. King Chŏngjo's final verdict on the matter fully incorporated such considerations of emotional circumstance:

> It [the murder incident] underwent four separate investigations, and with each inspection, the details changed and room for uncertainty grew. . . . One could determine Kim K'ŭnnom to be the main perpetrator, but it remains the fact that Kim Ch'odong had died from falling into the water, pointing to Kim Yŏnsŏk instead as the main perpetrator, and the murderer of Kim Ch'odong. Kim K'ŭnnom saw his brother's corpse in the water, and with the killer right in front of him, he, in a fit of rage, ignored all consequences and attacked him [Kim Ch'ondong] directly. These actions fit with natural principle and human feeling, so he could not have considered the existence of the law. As such, it is appropriate that he should be punished only lightly for this crime, and in light of human emotions and the circumstances, this crime may even

> be forgivable. Although the governor of Hwanghae Province and the Ministry of Punishments have recommended that Kim K'ŭnnom should be punished, there is no reason to cleave to normal regulations in this case. We order that Kim K'ŭnnom be released.[13]

King Chŏngjo concluded that Kim K'ŭnnom's beating to death of Kim Yŏnsŏk conformed to natural principle and human emotions because Kim K'ŭnnom was so enraged from witnessing his brother's death. He therefore decided to release Kim K'ŭnnom.

Years later, Chŏng Yagyong expressed his own opinion, which largely accorded with King Chŏngjo's judgment of the matter. In Chŏng's reckoning, Kim Ch'odong's death was "from being drowned; [which made] Yŏnsŏk someone who ought to have been [punished with] death. For someone who should have died to die at the hands of the aggrieved arrives at a justice that even an investigation according to the law might not be able to achieve."[14] In cases where someone who deserved death was killed by the very party who had been aggrieved, Chŏng was of the opinion that such situations did not count as murder.

But what if Kim Ch'odong did not die from drowning by Kim Yŏnsŏk, but instead committed suicide by jumping into the water because he could not endure the insults Yŏnsŏk hurled at him? Chŏng Yagyong did not leave behind an explicit opinion on this possibility, so it is difficult to say for sure, but it is most likely that he would not have seen exacting vengeance to have been appropriate. Chŏng admitted that attempting to avenge an insult is a very primal emotional reaction. For this reason, the *Rites of Zhou* did not preclude the possibility of righteous killing. Did this mean, however, that a simple insult could be grounds for just vengeance? For Chŏng, instances of "excessive or fanatical anger" could not satisfy the conditions for a righteous killing. The phrase "justice through killing" (*saliŭi* 殺而義) in the *Rites of Zhou* was explained in the commentaries of Zheng Xuan and Jia Gongyan as applying to cases where one kills to avenge the "defamation of one's parents, brethren, teachers, and elders."[15] Chŏng, however, rejected their interpretations:

> As for what is meant by "just killing," it refers to a case where the killed was guilty of committing the great evils of being unfilial, unfraternal, rebellious,

> or adulterous acts which, as they are contrary to human emotion and moral order, are unforgivable. How can a mere insult to one's parents and elders warrant one to take matters into one's own hands and kill?[16]

According to Chŏng Yagyong, a mere insult cannot be avenged with killing. Only where the crime was great enough to deserve death could such a killing be warranted and be considered "just." Chŏng thus criticized those in the late Chosŏn who killed others or committed suicide at the pettiest of slights. If the presence of a meager insult were enough to justify killing (or suicide), how dangerous of a society would that be? As such he urged that ideas of natural order or human emotion should not be used to expand the range of justified acts to bring leniency to criminal cases.

PUBLIC OUTRAGE AND RIGHTEOUS KILLING

Who has the prerogative to kill someone who deserved death? It should of course belong to the family of the aggrieved.[17] But what about cases involving a third party? The central factors for determining whether a case meets the conditions of a "just killing" included whether the target had committed a crime deserving death, and who had the ability to mete out that punishment.[18] Like the case of Kim Ŭnae, the case of Sin Yŏch'ŏk was also selected by King Chŏngjo as a model example of a just killing. Chŏng Yagyong also saw these two cases as representative examples of just killings in the late Chosŏn period. In 1790, Kim Sunch'ang from Changhŭng in Chŏlla Province beat his younger brother Kim Sunnam over two *t'oe* (3.6 liters) of barley. Sin Yŏch'ŏk, who lived in the same neighborhood, heard of this incident and sought out Kim Sunch'ang. Reprimanding him for lacking fraternal love, Sin gave Sunman Kim a beating, which led to Kim's death two days later.[19]

The Ministry of Punishment, which reviewed this case recommended severe punishment for Sin: "[i]f neighbors fight, it is appropriate to close one's doors and not meddle in their affairs. If one wants to break up a fight in one's village, how is it that one comes to blows and kicks? [Sin] has confessed to murder, so he must receive the death penalty."[20] King Chŏngjo in his final ruling, however, commended Sin Yŏch'ŏk's spirit, praising him for rising to the occasion to punish immorality.[21] Kim Sunch'ang, lacking any fraternal affection, was no better than an animal, and it appeared he thought

that everyone should castigate him. Chŏngjo did not commend Sin for the act of punishment per se, but rather his "righteous spirit" and even promulgated his example as a model for emulation by others. Chŏng Yagyong also recognized Sin Yŏch'ŏk's "righteous spirit." He cited a passage in the *Rites of Zhou*, which states that a righteous person would not be willing to live in the same country as someone who has slain his elder, to describe the propriety of Sin Yŏch'ŏk's actions. Chŏng Yagyong agreed with King Chŏngjo's decision to apply this reasoning from the *Zhou Rites* to spare Sin Yŏch'ŏk and praised the king for understanding the "original purpose" of the *Zhou Rites*.[22]

Chŏng identified Sin Yŏch'ŏk's actions as a kind of "righteous fury" (*ŭibun* 義憤). The idea of righteous fury implied that only in cases of horridly immoral acts deserving of punishment and cases where the ones punishing these acts were truly righteous individuals could a killing be considered "righteous." The incident involving Kim Sehwi of Koksan in Hwanghae Province fit these criteria. When Yun T'aekchŏng was trying to rape a young girl, Kim Sehwi, under the influence of alcohol, pulled out his knife and killed Yun.[23] The official in charge of investigating this case originally treated it as a murder in his report:

> Yun T'aekchŏng's attempt to rape a young girl is not something a human does. That Kim Sehwi killed him under the influence is still a matter with some doubtful points, though we may consider it an act of heroism [*ŭihyŏp* 義俠]. Of course, Sehwi's actions cannot be compared with the spirit of the righteous stalwarts of yore. Nonetheless, emboldened with wine, his righteous spirit boiled over, and its force could be contained no longer. He suddenly remembered an act of injustice from the previous day, and with overflowing spirit, his feet and hands moved with alacrity, as if a ghost. Without even being aware of it, his hand thrust forward, and T'aekchŏng was dead. . . . The perpetrator had confessed and surrendered himself. As such, there is no place for further debate: Kim Sehwi must pay with his life.[24]

Chŏng Yagyong raised several issues regarding this ruling. Without King Chŏngjo's final verdict, there was no way to know for certain his reasoning, but Chŏng maintained that it was clear the king had spared Kim Sehwi on the grounds of "just killing." Chŏng inferred this from a statute in the *Sok taejŏn* (Supplementary grand code 續大典) stating, "abducting and raping a woman

of commoner or base status shall be punished with death by strangulation."[25] Someone who had raped a young girl surely also deserved to be punished with death. Chŏng determined that since Yun T'aekchŏng had clearly deserved death for raping a young girl, Kim Sehwi had killed in righteousness, and it was clear that Kim Sehwi in turn deserved to be pardoned.[26]

In the Zhu Xi Confucian ritual system, righteous killing was not punished but encouraged. At the center of Zhu Xi thought is the idea that "from the son of heaven above to the common people below, everyone ought to become aware of their own moral character and position, aid in the moral self-awareness of others, and continue doing so until a just society, based on the universal realization of moral character, has been constructed."[27] In other words, not only is one supposed to unlock one's own moral character but also intervene in the moral failures of others. Doing so cultivates among the populace the capacity to perform "righteous outrage," an important precondition for the ideal society desired in Zhu Xi's philosophical and political vision.

This notion did not differ greatly from the social vision the late Chosŏn kings Yŏngjo (r. 1724–76) and Chŏngjo (r. 1776–1800) hoped to actualize in their attempt to transform customs and civilize the population. This civilization process not only encouraged the people to "administer themselves" but also promoted a system where they would engage in "mutual surveillance and punishment." It was precisely this mutual accountability that was both a technique and the goal of a Zhu Xi Neo-Confucian moral order. Righteous killing, as a reflection of public outrage, was thus an important indicator of this sort of social progress.[28] The problem of encouraging righteous killing for the Zhu Xi Neo-Confucian social plan, however, was that it could potentially generate social instability.

Chŏng Yagyong therefore tried to strictly define the conditions for what could be considered a just killing in order to prevent the proliferation of violence committed in the name of righteousness. In the late Chosŏn when righteous outrage was held in esteem, Chŏng observed that suicides and murders where death was unwarranted had risen. He looked upon this issue with the concern that this rise was owed not to righteous outrage per se but to an oversensitivity to insult and shame.

MISPLACED FURY AND THE PROBLEM OF AUTHENTICITY

The esteem of righteous outrage in the late Chosŏn period was related to the statute on forceful intimidation (K: *wip'imnyul*; C: *weibi lü*, 威逼律), which first appeared in the Taemyŏng yul (Great Ming Code). The statute applied to situations where the strong, by bringing insult to the weak, causes the weak, unable to bear the outrage or shame, to commit suicide. The statute therefore demanded punishment in consideration of the grievance and injustice suffered by the dead.[29] The law also reflected the Confucian legal principle of suppressing the oppressor and supporting the weak. Although the principle behind the forceful intimidation statute was to protect the weak, it had the counterintuitive effect of incentivizing suicide by the weaker party. Since the death of the victim ensured the offender would be subject to more severe penalties, cases where a victim committed suicide after an incident to exact vengeance against an offender would have increased.[30]

In the Chosŏn period, the application of the forceful intimidation statute appeared alongside such cases of suicide. One such case occurred in 1778, when a Ms. Ch'oe of Chaeryŏng in Hwanghae Province, had been scraping out a life for herself and her family by harvesting grain on the land of her fifth-degree uncle, Yi Kyŏnghwi, when he lashed out at her and accused her of being a grain thief. After suffering this indignation, Ms. Ch'oe became pessimistic about her prospects and committed suicide by jumping into the river with her children and nephews. With seven dead in all, the incident was treated as a particularly grave matter.[31] The governor of Hwanghae Province suggested applying the statute of forceful intimidation and administering the lightest appropriate punishment of one hundred beatings. He also reported that the heaviest allowed punishment of death would be difficult to apply in this case. In response King Chŏngjo promulgated the following decision:

> A woman without support harbors such grievance that she loses all spirit of harmony and takes her own life. And with seven in total perishing—what an extraordinary calamity. . . . If the death penalty is not applied in this case, how could her aggrieved soul be comforted? . . . The main perpetrator Yi Kyŏnghwi did not only have an avuncular relation with the deceased but also owed to them the duties of a neighbor. . . . He refrained from no ill and compelled them to their deaths. To punish this person according to the laws

> of this kingdom with death alone would even be inadequate for recompensing the seven perished lives. . . . Regarding the governor's report. . . it is a gross misuse of the language of the law. . . . The governor should be investigated and interrogated with severity.[32]

Confronting a degradation of moral custom that allowed discord over meager material interest to result in the loss of seven lives, Chŏngjo not only charged Yi Kyŏnghwi with crimes of great insolence but also ordered the harsh interrogation of the governor of Hwanghae Province who had suggested a lighter sentence for Yi. The Third Minister of Punishments agreed, and King Chŏngjo passed his final judgment:

> The main culprit Yi Kyŏnghwi did not kill directly with a knife, but it is suspected he threatened [the victim] with beatings and had also intimidated her by accusing her of being a thief. With such severe threats and intimidation, he caused their deaths all at once. How can we avoid [applying] the statute of forceful intimidation? Moreover, for such a calamity to happen because of conflict from members of the same family—given the efforts of this court to elevate customs, how can such an action be allowed to be negligently passed over? Yi Kyŏnghhwi should be subject to severe torture in wake of his punishment by death. The inquisitors shall carry this out strictly.[33]

King Chŏngjo, in this verdict, was much more concerned with moral edification than he was with the law. Years later, Chŏng Yagyong rejected the King's reasoning. Beginning with the notion that cases with capital crimes should be judged with complete impartiality, he criticized the king's sentence for Yi Kyŏnghwi as excessive:

> Of all criminal cases in the world, impartiality is most necessary in capital crime cases [*sarok* 殺獄]. For instance, even if there are no wounds on the body, but the context is grave or culprit vicious, it should be treated as murder. If ten lives are lost at the same time, but the context of the crime is veritably minor [in malice], then leniency and the commutation of death should be sought. For determining the severity of a crime, how could the number of the deceased be the sole basis?"[34]

For Chŏng Yagyong, ruling this case on the basis of seven deaths fell short of impartiality. Was Yi Kyŏnghwi's "insult" something that warranted the death of seven lives? It was clear that to punish Yi Kyŏnghwi severely was bending the law to serve the demands of court's civilizing project and thus fell short of a fair judgment. Chŏng concluded that the party that should be made responsible for taking the seven lives was Ms. Ch'oe:

> If we are to determine who is guilty of ending the lives of these seven, the responsibility falls on Ms. Ch'oe as both suicide and murderer. Killing oneself is still killing a person; while killing one's children is also murder. In the humble opinion of this subject, I see only the murder committed by Ms. Ch'oe; I do not see where Yi Kyŏnghwi is guilty of murder.[35]

Chŏng Yagyong did not see the number of killed to be sufficient for treating the case as forceful intimidation and opposed using the death penalty. Of King Chŏngjo who applied the forceful intimidation statute and applied extreme punishments on the culprit, Chŏng reserved only his criticism. In his view, it not only damaged the justice of the law but also created more grievance by taking sides. Even if the dead numbered far more than seven, responsibility for these deaths could not be assigned to Yi Kyŏnghwi. Instead, Ms. Ch'oe, the victim of the insults who tried to exact vengeance through suicide, was responsible. Her anger, overzealous and narrow, was outrage misdirected. Therefore, Ms. Ch'oe's suicide did not result from legitimate righteous outrage.

On the other hand, in the late Chosŏn period, the boundary between a murder motivated by a misdirected, personal indignation and that of a righteous killing was murky. In 1784, a private slave, Kwŏn Pokjŏm of Chinju, Kyŏngsang Province, had killed herself by jumping into the river after being scolded by her mother-in-law, Madam Kim. Kwŏn's brother, Poksun, tied up Madam Kim and beat her with a pikestaff, causing the woman's death eight days later.[36] At the time, the Ministry of Rites advocated treating the case in light of extenuating circumstances, because Kwŏn Pokjŏm had thrown herself into the river on account of her mother-in-law's vicious actions. The year after the case had occurred in 1785, King Chŏngjo gave his final verdict, which had taken into consideration the extenuating circumstances that motivated Poksun:

> Whether the cause of [Madam Kim's] death was disease or a beating, whether the attacker was this person or that person are not matters for further debate. The accused Kwŏn Poksun has a brother-sister relationship with Pokjŏm. With the profound love between those born of the same spirit, is there anyone who would not do as he had? . . . . [Poksun] beat the mother-in-law to assuage his sister's anguish; to intimidate her to the point of death was somewhat extreme, but it was all in order to purge his sister of her grievance and pain by taking vengeance on her enemy. . . . If we do not spare Kwŏn Poksun according to the principle of considering extenuating circumstances [*wŏnjŏng chi ron* 原情之論], for whom would we apply the principle? I especially order Kwŏn Poksun to be released.[37]

Chŏng Yagyong, however, warned against exonerating a murderer simply on account of the brother-sister relationship and affection. Chŏng could not ascertain the exact situation without seeing the original case files, but he pointed out that King Chŏngjo's ruling—by recording the uncertainty of Madam Kim's cause of death—remained doubtful over the crime and exonerated Kwŏn out of pity. If it had been clear he had killed Madam Kim by beating her, he certainly would not have been released.[38]

Disregarding King Chŏngjo's broader goals, Chŏng Yagyong believed that the vengeance the older brother enacted was not justified. In reality, how could anyone know if Kwŏn Pokjŏm, unable to control her own irrational temperament, had killed herself on account of a minor scolding by her mother-in-law? According to Chŏng, it is because of this uncertainty that King Chŏngjo had considered "illness" the cause of the mother-in-law's death as a way to further exculpate Kwŏn Poksun. Chŏng opposed identifying forceful intimidation as a reason for women with imbalanced dispositions to commit suicide. Neither did he support the punishment of the perpetrator or allow them to be targets of vendettas. He blamed suicides on women's imbalanced personalities that allowed them to be so easily aggrieved by minor matters.[39]

Disturbing the distinction between righteous fury and simple murder, a Ms. An of Koksan in Hwanghae Province avenged her husband Ch'oe Chubyŏn by killing Min Sŏngju. Ch'oe and Min were both caretakers of the Koksan warehouse. The two were having fun swinging a knife around when Ch'oe was accidentally injured and died soon after from his injuries. For this

reason, Ms. An killed Min in revenge. The local official in charge of the investigation reported that Ms. An should be commended for her chaste virtue because she had killed Ch'oe to avenge her husband.[40] Chŏng Yagyong, however, pointed out that both Min and Ch'oe had been toying with the knife; Ch'oe's death from losing control of the knife was an accident. Since Min did not kill Ch'oe directly with the knife, Chŏng concluded that Ms. An's vengeance was not an act of virtuous sacrifice but simple murder stating:

> For a wife to avenge her husband by slaying his killer has special meaning in the moral framework of the Three Bonds and Five Relations [*samgang oryun*]. It was an act of utmost virtue. . . . However, this incident was different. For one, as a result of their fooling around, Ch'oe only suffered a wound to his ankle bone. Investigating the wound reveals that the knife had glanced to the side and was not thrust into the flesh. As such, Ch'oe's death resulted from the poor treatment of the wound and exposure to cold wind. . . . It is likely that this foolish woman from the countryside had heard of the idea that one must avenge the death of one's husband by killing his murderer. . . . Even so, if one does not assign guilt to Ms. An for having committed murder, there will be countless others who would follow her terrible example. Acts of virtue which violate moral principle should not be accommodated by the law.[41]

It is of deep significance that Chŏng Yagyong insisted acts committed in the name of virtue, while also bringing harm to moral principle should not be permitted by law. A foolish woman from the countryside had harmed moral principle through this extreme act, which had arisen from her thinking only of her own desire for vengeance. Even members of the officialdom were confused about the precise meaning of righteous outrage, when it came to women who killed being elevated as chaste women.

AUTHENTICITY AND FALSITY OF VIRTUOUS SACRIFICE

More than anything, Chŏng Yagyong underscored authenticity in acts of virtuous sacrifice. He took to task those guilty of insincere piety: "what sort of situation is this, where these filial children used the death of their parents to startle the world as a way to steal honor and recognition?"[42] He also exposed

many instances of false loyalty among those who were honored as righteous soldiers (*ŭibyŏng* 義兵) during the Imjin War.[43] What Chŏng found most egregious was the failure to distinguish between imbalanced temperament and authentic righteous outrage among the women who died as exemplars of virtue and chastity.

This critique applied not only to those women who committed suicide to follow husbands who had died of illness or other natural causes. According to Chŏng Yagyong, if a woman died for no reason, she was not as praiseworthy as a chaste woman. Instead she was a woman, possessed by temperamental resentment, who hastily ended her own life. Chŏng once refused to make a request for a memorial gate for a relative's wife who committed suicide as a demonstration of her chastity. In 1801, during his exile, Chŏng's younger male second cousin Chŏng Sangyŏ died from an illness brought on by grief over his mother's death. His wife, Ms. Ch'oe, then starved herself to death. The local scholars submitted to the local government a request to honor her with a memorial gate, stating that it would be our dishonor to be unable to exhibit Ms. Ch'oe's chaste virtue and filial devotion. Chŏng Yagyong was asked to write a letter in support of this petition to the local office, yet he courteously refused to do so, saying that the act of following her husband in death was not proper.[44]

Chŏng Yagyong lamented the trend of women ending their lives so carelessly and the state's policy of commemorating their actions, as if they really conformed to moral principle. These were not moments of crisis where a woman had rescued her husband from imminent death. Nor did they take their own lives to maintain their chastity in the face of rape. They were cases where the women had killed themselves because they could not handle the grief of losing their husbands, and were thus, according to Chŏng, not actions that should be commemorated. Some however criticized Chŏng, pointing out that a woman who followed her husband in death was not in search of fame but did so out of pure intentions. To say she was not a chaste woman was going too far.

Chŏng Yagyong, in his *Yŏlburon* (Discussion on chaste women 烈婦論), explained in detail what he considered to be a justified and virtuous death: "[o]f all the baleful things in this world, there is none worse than taking one's own life. . . . Taking one's own life can only be appropriate when one is seeking justice."[45] Chŏng proposed the following requirements for a wom-

an's morally purposeful death: (1) when her husband is being threatened by a tiger or a bandit, then the wife who dies in an attempt to rescue her husband can be called a chaste woman; (2) when she takes her own life in resistance to rape by a criminal or lecher; (3) when a woman's parents or brothers force her to remarry against her will, and she kills herself because she does not have the power to resist; and (4) when a husband dies from severe indignation and the wife, in grievous lamentation tries to reveal the truth of the matter in order to exonerate him but, failing to do so, dies as a result of being subject to judicial punishment.[46] If these conditions are not met, then, according to Chŏng, a woman's death alone could not qualify her for the status of a virtuous woman. In his view, there were too many women who were given the title of virtuous woman without meeting the necessary conditions, creating a situation whereby the common people were essentially being encouraged to die.

Chŏng Yagyong cautioned against the confusion of an imbalanced disposition with that of righteous anger that guarded against moral grievance and injustice. Of course, the ultimate goal of the Zhu Xi Neo-Confucian system that Chosŏn society sought to actualize was precisely the instillation of a moral awareness in the people who understood how to unleash outrage toward injustice and impropriety. Chŏng defined clear and strict conditions for "just killing." If this distinction between just killing and wanton violence could not be clearly maintained, private violence could transform into public justice, and illegitimate violence would run rampant. As a condition for *appropriate* violence, Chŏng demanded that its enactors have a mature and developed moral sensibility and understand what authentic virtuous sacrifice was. In other words, not everyone had the ability to commit a violent act justly.

Chŏng Yagyong's opinion in this matter was on some level a critique of Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism. Zhu Xi Neo-Confucians recognized the intrinsic moral character of all people. Regardless of social station, all individuals had the potential to become virtuous. This notion became stronger in the late Chosŏn period when the moral standards of aristocrats now extended to the commoners as well. Many morality books were translated into Korean script.[47] Commoners read the stories of Kim Ŭnae and Sin Yŏch'ŏk and were coaxed to restore proper human relations. For all commoners to recover their intrinsic moral character was seen from the lens of Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism to be an actualization of an ideal society.

For Chŏng Yagyong, the reality of the matter was much more troubling. The idea of "luminous virtue" was not something simply to be given to every individual.[48] For Neo-Confucians however, "even the most vile and evil person still displays the original character of humanity."[49] They held that "an ignorant and slave woman possessed the original character of humanity."[50] With statements such as, "any person passing by on the road, if he possessed the original character of humanity, would surely be moved to anger," they thought that man's moral nature would be expressed easily.[51] Chŏng worried about the many acts of violence that postured as acts of justice. If one showed tolerance, indiscriminate violence carried out by commoners rewarded for righteous anger would grow unchecked:

> Estranged from propriety, those vicious louts were the most despicable and the most deserving of death in the world. Getting drunk and causing a commotion in the streets—and, after raising a dispute, hurling harsh accusations at an entire village of several hundred households—they were entirely without morality. Not a single person in the village dared to intervene until the hot-blooded yangban An Sŭngnyŏm was provoked and saw the need to take up public justice in his own hands. [Author's note: An had beaten commoner Pak Yujae to death]. An wished to eliminate the evil and avenge the wrongs for his entire village. There are cases when he killed with justification. But his methods were shocking. An meted cruel punishment and confiscated property, all in clear violation of the law. Using wooden sandals to strike people's heads was purely an evil practice. He used violence to repay violence and barbaric methods to attack barbarity. As such, his actions were no longer acts of justice, but simply murder. . . . This is truly a regrettable affair.[52]

Chŏng Yagyong offered An Sŭngnyŏm's case as an example of someone who administered violence in the name of justice, but his killing of a commoner exposed his act to be nothing more than a case of unbridled rage. An's barbaric use of violence could not amount to a morally authentic or just killing. Chŏng underscored the difficulty of moral authenticity. Although everyone had the potential to become men of true virtue, not everyone could put the principles of justice in practice. For Chŏng, only those people who embodied virtue in their everyday practice could possibly accomplish the mor-

ally authentic act of killing. Such recognition could not be permitted to those who could not suppress their misdirected fury.

For Chŏng Yagyong, the labels "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom [that] are acquired only after one's actions," were not "inherent to the character of man."[53] The problem with Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism, as Chŏng poignantly remarked, was since people believed "anyone can become a sage by awakening the natural virtue in one's heart," they could "identify themselves as morally upright gentlemen without practicing virtue."[54] Chŏng, who advocated strict differentiation between true and false virtuous sacrifice, hoped to prevent damage to the morally authentic forms of virtuous sacrifice by preventing its conflation with overzealous and selfish expressions of outrage. Indeed, virtuous sacrifice as a value should be encouraged for everyone, but its facile practice should not be permitted— this is the central idea in Chŏng's perspective on righteous killing.[55]

CONCLUSION

A situation where righteous violence could not be rejected altogether and where overzealous violence could not be mistaken for righteous outrage is what provoked Chŏng Yagyong's discourses on righteous killing. And it is here that Chŏng Yagyong's intention to preserve the Zhu Xi Neo-Confucian project of constructing a world of perfect goodness, where intrinsic moral nature is awakened, becomes apparent. In the late Chosŏn, with the rise in the commemoration of virtuous sacrifice, the intensity of these acts also increased. Ironically, suspicion and doubt over their authenticity increased as well. This lays the foundation for the so-called late Chosŏn question—skepticism over the moral nature of humanity.

Pak Chiwŏn had begun to debate the issue of moral authenticity in virtuous sacrifice. The result was a divergence from a long-established belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature. Pak allowed room for false piety in his response to this late Chosŏn question. Chŏng Yagyong, however, was different. He was concerned that Pak's position would lead to the mass production of false piety. Chŏng only recognized moral authenticity in virtuous deeds that emerged from continuous practice. Only when an act passed this high standard could it be praised as a morally authentic act of virtuous sacri-

fice. In this regard, one sees the stark difference between Chŏng's strictness and Pak's permissiveness.

Although Chŏng Yagyong did not reject the notion of human inclination toward goodness, he considered that man's naturally endowed "luminous virtue" was inadequate. Chŏng had found the Zhu Xi Neo-Confucian expectation that an individual could easily discover his or her intrinsic moral character to be mistaken. For someone to receive recognition as a virtuous gentleman, he would have had to cultivate himself for a long period. Chŏng also considered that many of the cases celebrated as virtuous sacrifice in the late Chosŏn were not moral deeds. Misplaced fury and unjustified grievance were often confused with true justice in many of these cases. He was also concerned that many of these acts of violence were committed in the name of justice only, and many commoners and women had too easily become exemplars of virtuous sacrifice. In Chŏng's eyes, the overflow of violence committed in the guise of glorious "virtuous sacrifice" was but an early omen of social disorder.

Insomuch as Zhu Xi Neo-Confucians emphasized civilizing social mores, they also had to keep the door to the altar of martyrdom wide open. Chŏng Yagyong kept the doors to the altar as narrow as possible, because the more the civilizing mission was emphasized, the more quickly society became disordered. However, if the door became too narrow, it might disappear altogether when too many people flock to it. What could be done then? This here is the aporia in the discourse of virtuous sacrifice.

NOTES

1. *Hyŏnjong sillok* [Veritable records of King Hyŏnjong's reign] 15: 9a [9/7/27].

2. In 1671, Song Siyŏl completed the "Samhaksa chŏn" [The story of the Three Scholars] in the *Songja taejŏn* Volume 213, which documented the deeds and martyrdom of the Three Scholars. See Chŏng Okcha, "Pyŏngja horan si ŏn'gwan ŭi wisang kwa hwaltong" [Position and activities of censorial officials during the Manchu invasions].

3. Chang Kyŏngnam, "17-segi yŏllyŏ tamnon kwa sosŏlchŏk taeŭng" [Response to seventeenth-century discourses on chaste women in fiction], 37. The *Han Kanghan chŏn* [Biography of Han Kanghan] argues for the value of living by emphasizing the importance of maintaining sacrifices to ancestors and self-reflection as progeny, while the *Ch'oe Ch'ŏk chŏn* [Biography of Ch'oe Ch'ŏk] borrows Buddhist prohibitions against killing to the Confucian question of chastity. Pak Hŭibyŏng, trans., *Ch'oe Ch'ŏk chŏn*.

4. Chŏng Yagyong, "Simunjip: Yŏlburon" [A discourse on virtuous women].

5. Chŏng Yagyong, "Mongmin simsŏ" [Admonitions for shepherding the people] 7, Kyomin 7.

6. Ibid.

7. Kim Ho, "Yŏnam Pak Chiwŏn ŭi hyŏngjŏngnon" [Study on Yŏnam Pak Chiwŏn's theory of punishment]; and Kim Hyŏlcho, "Yŏnam ŭi 'Yŏllyŏ Hamyang Pak ssi chŏn' chaego: Saeroun charyo sogae rŭl kyŏmhayŏ" [A reinvestigation of Yŏnam's biography of the chaste woman Pak from Hamyang: With an introduction to new sources].

8. I call this the "Late Chosŏn condition," suggesting that it was a moment of aporia between morality and truth. See also Harry G. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* for a discussion of these issues.

9. Pak Chiwŏn, *Yŏnamjip* [The collected works of Pak Chiwŏn] 3, "Kongjakkwan mungo [Manuscript of the peacock pavilion], Myŏngnon" [Discussion of names].

10. Chŏng Yagyong, "Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ" [New treatise on diligent jurisprudence] 1, "Kyŏngsa yoŭi" [The essential meaning of the classics and histories]. For an overview of research on vengeance in the Chosŏn period, see Sim Hŭigi, "Poksugo sŏsŏl" [Preliminary discussion on the investigation of revenge].

11. The "Ŭnae chŏn" [Biography of Ŭnae] has been studied mostly in the field of Korean literature. See Kim Chinyŏng, *Chosŏn hugi sosuja ŭi sam kwa hyŏngsang: 200-yŏn chŏn i ttang ŭi mainŏrit'i, kŭ sam ŭi pagosŏ* [The lives and experiences of late Chosŏn's minorities: The life and reports of the minorities who lived on this land two hundred years ago]; Yi Tŏngmu, "Ŭnae chŏn"; and Pak Iryong et.al., *Han'guk kososŏl yŏn'gu ŭi chaengchŏm kwa chŏnmang* [Points of disputation and prospectus on the study of premodern Korean fiction].

12. For this incident, see Chŏngjo, *Simnirok* [Record of interrogation and judgment] 20: "P'yŏngsan pu Kim Taeromi oksa" [Matter of the death in prison of Kim Taeromi in P'yŏngsan prefecture].

13. For Chŏngjo's final verdict, see Chŏngjo, *Simnirok* 20.

14. Chŏng Yagyong, "Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ" 8, Sanghyŏng ch'uŭi [Late discussion of unfortunate punishments] 10, "Poksŏl chi wŏn" [Revenging his (her) family], 3.

15. Chŏng Yagyong, "Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ" 1, Kyŏngsa yoŭi [The essential meaning of the classics and histories] 1, "Ŭisal mulsu chi ŭi" [Prohibiting revenge of the death penalty executed by law].

16. Ibid.

17. King Chŏngjo used the example of Kim Kyeson, who killed the murderer of his father, as the quintessential case of righteous killing in the *Iryun haengsil to* [The illustrated guide to the two relations]. See Chŏngjo's proclamation in *Simnirok* 23, "Ch'ungch'ŏng-do Nisŏnghyŏn Kim Kyeson Sŏngson ok" [Kim Kyeson and Kim Sŏngson imprisonment in Ch'ungch'ŏng Province Nisŏng Prefecture].

18. For Chŏng Yagyong's rebuttal to Nam Kuman's proposal for a state monopoly on punishment, see Kim Ho, "Chosŏn hugi 'wip'imnyul' ŭi chŏgyong kwa Tasan Chŏng Yagyong ŭi taeming'wan" [Late Chosŏn application of the forced intimidation statute and Chŏng Yagyong's perspective on common people].

19. Chŏngjo, *Simnirok* 21, "Chŏlla-do Changhung-bu Sin Yŏch'ŏk ok" [Sin Yŏch'ŏk imprisonment in Chŏlla Province Changhŭngpu Prefecture].

20. See Chŏngjo, *Simnirok* 21, "Chŏlla-do Changhung-bu Sin Yŏch'ŏk ok" for the judicial report from the Ministry of Punishments.

21. See King Chŏngjo's ruling in Chŏngjo, *Simnirok* 21, "Chŏlla-do Changhung-bu Sin Yŏch'ŏk ok."

22. Chŏng Yagyong, "Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ" 8, Sanghyŏng ch'uŭi, 11 "Ŭigi chi sa" [Forgiving crimes], 1.

23. Chŏng Yagyong, "Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ" 8, Sanghyŏng ch'uŭi 11 "Ŭigi chi sa," 2.

24. Ibid.

25. "Hyŏngjon [Penal code], Sarok [Murder cases]," *Sok taejŏn* Vol. 5.

26. Chŏng Yagyong, "Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ 8," Sanghyŏng ch'uŭi 11 "Ŭigi chi sa," 2.

27. Mizoguchi Yūzō, "Chungguk kŭnse sasangsa esŏ ŭi tongilsŏng kwa ch'abyŏlsŏng" [Integration and differentiation in the history of early modern Chinese thought].

28. See Kim Ho, "'Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ' ŭi il koch'al: Tasan ŭi kwaosal haesŏk ŭl chungsim ŭro". [An investigation of the "Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ": On Tasan's explication of excessive and mistaken killing], 242.

29. *Da Ming lü* [The great Ming code] 19, xinglü [Penal code] 2, "Weibiren zhisi" [Using coercion to cause others to die].

30. For Chŏng Yagyong's critique of late Chosŏn applications of this statute, see Kim Ho, "Chosŏn hugi 'wipimnyul' ŭi chŏgyong kwa Tasan Chŏng Yagyong ŭi taemin'gwan," 87.

31. See Chŏngjo, *Simnirok* 11, "Hwanghaedo Chaeryŏng-gun Yi Kyŏnghwi ok" [Yi Kyŏnghwi imprisonment in Hwanghae Province Chaenyŏng Prefecture].

32. Ibid.

33. For the discussions of the Ministry of Punishments and King Chŏngjo's proclamation, see Chŏngjo, *Simnirok* 11, "Hwanghaedo Chaeryŏng-gun Yi Kyŏnghwi ok."

34. Chŏng Yagyong, "Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ" 7, Sanghyŏng ch'uŭi 9, "Wip'ip chi aek" 1.

35. Ibid.

36. See Chŏngjo, *Simnirok* 15, "Kyŏngsang-do Andong-bu Kwŏn Poksun ok" [Kwŏn Poksun imprisonment in Kyŏngsang Province Andong Prefecture].

37. See Chŏngjo's proclamation in *Simnirok* 15, "Kyŏngsang-do Andong-bu Kwŏn Poksun ok."

38. Chŏng Yagyong, "Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ" 8, Sanghyŏng ch'uŭi 1 [Late discussion of unfortunate punishments], "Poksŏl chi wŏn" [Revenging one's family], 4.

39. Chŏng Yagyong usually dismissed the deaths of women with such temperament. He distinguished women of low virtue who died from gloom, because they could not conquer their vile anger, from women of high virtue who died because they could not bear the dishonor of injustice. See Chŏng Yagyong, *Simunjip* [Verse and prose collections] 13, "Chinju ŭigisa ki" [Record of temple to righteous Chinju *kisaeng*].

40. Chŏng Yagyong, "Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ" 10, Chŏnal musa [Chŏng Yagyong's comments on murder cases] 1, "Suangun Ch'oe Chubyŏn pokkŏm palsa" [Governor's second comment on Ch'oe Chubyŏn's case in Suan Prefecture].

41. Ibid.

42. Chŏng Yagyong, "Simunjip 2, 'Hyojaron'" [Discourse on the filial son].

43. Chŏng Yagyong, "Simunjip 2, 'Ch'ungsinron'" [Discourse of the loyal subject].

44. Chŏng Yagyong, "Simunjip 16, 'Chŏlbu Ch'oe ssi myojimyŏng'" [An epitaph on the virtuous woman Ch'oe].

45. Chŏng Yagyong, "Simunjip 2, 'Yŏlburon'" [A discourse on virtuous women].

46. Ibid.

47. Yi Tŏngmu, "Ŭnae Chŏn"; and Yi Tŏngmu, "Chŏksŏng hyŏn'gam sŏn'go pugun yŏnbo" [The chronological record of my late father].

48 Chŏng Yagyong believed in the Zhu Xi Neo-Confucian idea that anyone can unlock their moral potential but only after regular and sustained virtuous activity. It would seem, based on Chŏng's position here, he was rejecting the Zhu Xi Neo-Confucian belief in the possibility of awakening an intrinsically human nature. However, Chŏng did not subscribe to the Edo period Kogaku School idea of "making the people naïve." Chŏng's position on this issue was somewhere between classical Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism and Edo Kogaku positions and sought a "reformation of practice." See Cai Zhenfeng, *Chaoxian ruzhe Ding Ruoyong de Sishuxue: Yi Dongya wei shiye de taolun* [Chosŏn's Chŏng Yagyong's studies on the four books: A discussion from the perspective of East Asia], 263–86.

49. Chŏng Yagyong, "Simnirok 14, 'P'yŏngyang Kang Kwidong ok'" [Kang Kwidong imprisonment in P'yŏngan Province P'yongyang Prefecture].

50. Chŏng Yagyong, "Simnirok 3, 'Sŏpu An Chonghyŏn ok'" [An Chonghyŏn imprisonment in Sŏpu, Seoul].

51. Chŏng Yagyong, "Simnirok 13, 'Pongsan Pak Pongson ok'" [Pak Pongson imprisonment in Hwanghae Province Pongsan Prefecture].

52. Chŏng Yagyong, "Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ" 7, Sanghyŏng ch'uŭi 9, Hogang chi hak" [The Hogang massacre], 2. Chŏng Yagyong did not only see a problem with the moral nature of commoners and base-born people. He also criticized the yangban for even worse false piety and immorality. He once stated that he wished for "all the people of the country to become yangban so that yangban would disappear." This statement was not a rejection of yangban society per se but was a roundabout indictment of a situation

where "true" yangban (i.e. those who comported themselves as yangban should) had already nearly disappeared. Chŏng Yagyong, "Simunjip 14, 'Pal Ko Chŏngnim saengwŏn non'" [Epilogue to discussion on licentiate by Ko Chŏngnim].

53. Chŏng Yagyong, "Chungyong kangŭi po [Addendum to exegesis of the *Doctrine of the Mean*] 1, 'Chŏnha chi taldo ojŏl'" [On five constant virtues].

54. Song Chaeso, "Tasan haktan yŏn'gu sŏsŏl" [Preliminary discussion on the study of Tasan's scholarly community]. Chŏng Yagyong's critique of Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism went beyond the realm of classical exegesis and dove deeply into concrete problems of the construction of social order.

55. Here it is necessary to examine the practical implications of Chŏng Yagyong's discussions on the hedonism of human nature (*sŏng kiho ron*). See Chŏng Ilgyun, *Tasan sasŏ kyŏnghak yŏn'gu* [A study of Chŏng Yagyong's four books of scholarship]

3

Resurrecting Ch'oe Cheu: Tonghak Martyrdom in Late Chosŏn Dynasty Korea

GEORGE KALLANDER

In January 1864, soldiers from the small town of Kyŏngju in southeastern Korea entered the home of a local scholar, Ch'oe Poksul (1824–64) and arrested him and twenty-three other men.[1] The operation was part of an investigation meant to apprehend the leader of Tonghak, or Eastern Learning, a religious sect originating in the Kyŏngju area.[2] During the raid, investigators discovered the widespread popularity of Tonghak. Their teaching was familiar to Koreans of many ages; Koreans from nearly 200 kilometers away and roughly halfway to Seoul were familiar with Tonghak. High and low, from educated *yangban* literati to simple woodcutters, merchants, and slaves, were knowledgeable of it. Investigators accused Ch'oe of deluding the people with magical remedies for disease and misfortune and spreading these ideas by establishing a school in his home where he composed texts for study and memorization. Government reports described how Tonghak combined personal hygiene with strange rituals and beliefs. For instance, Ch'oe's teachings called for practitioners to cleanse their mouths and bodies and recite mystical expressions, promising that followers who did so could be saved from illness. Some Tonghak practices involved attending discussions on doctrine at his home, while others included accompanying Ch'oe to mountain alters where, after he made offerings, followers prayed to heaven.

This situation was of great concern to the central government as popular religious expression was controlled by law. Further, the government was well aware of the bloody struggles in neighboring Qing Dynasty China with its popular religious sects, such as the White Lotus and Taiping religions, that had rebelled against the state. Seoul wished to avoid the same upheavals in Korea. The investigation unfolded with the Kyŏngsang provincial magistrate's

interrogation of the prisoners, directed by the Grand Queen Dowager Cho, who assumed control over the government that month upon the death of King Ch'ŏljong (r. 1849–64). "There is no room for such absolute stupidity and foolishness," she pronounced, supporting the decision by the Council of State to execute Ch'oe and publicly display his head to ensure, in her words, that "the people come to their senses."[3] Ch'oe was transferred to the provincial capital Taegu where, following his interrogation, he was executed. For the central government, this ended the sect's threat to the people and the state. Despite such attention by all levels of the government, Ch'oe's teachings did not die with him. Instead, a handful of leaders hid in marginal areas of the south and, within a few years, began rebuilding the community. By the 1890s the religious message had spread, energizing followers to rebel against government persecution and rally to fight Japanese troops in Korea. Although the 1894 Tonghak rebellion failed to enact change, the community remained active. Ch'oe's doctrine, and the religious organizations that emerged in the wake of the uprising, had a lasting impact on the religious, cultural, and political identity of twentieth-century Korea.

The survival of Tonghak after the death of Ch'oe rested on the canonization of his teachings and the composition of texts that glorified his life, arrest, and execution. These works transformed Ch'oe from a state criminal into a religious and political martyr. In the Tonghak tradition of the late nineteenth century, no genre of martyrdom stories is known.[4] Despite some similarities to Catholic religious practices, including discussions about God (Sangje) and the use of another term for God, "Ch'ŏnju," in their incantations, the Tonghaks did not pay much attention to the martyrdom of average followers, as the Catholics did, to demonstrate the attraction of Tonghak teaching. Whether Tonghak leaders composing these works had access to texts about martyrs in Catholic or other religious traditions is unclear. Evidence is only indirect. Western religious practices were present in Korea when Tonghak arose in 1860 and grew in the 1880s with the signing of treaties with Western nations. By the turn of the twentieth century, these and other Western religions were active in Korea. It is clear from the Tonghak works of the founder that he understood some aspects of Catholicism. The images deployed in Tonghak writings mirrored Western religious stories of mysticism, unjust government persecution, and conviction of faith. By the 1880s and 1890s, it is plausible to assume that Tonghak leaders had knowl-

edge of Christianity, including the death of Jesus as the first martyr who died to save humanity.

Regardless of the level of interaction between Tonghak and Western religions, the theme of martyrdom emerged as part of the early historical texts written by Tonghak, persuasive narratives acting as socio-religious expressions that concerned the patriarchs of the religious community, first Ch'oe Cheu and later Ch'oe Sihyŏng (1827–98), the second Tonghak leader following the death of the founder. They depict the experiences of these leaders in the face of government arrest, interrogation, and execution. In these hagiographic works, Ch'oe Cheu and Ch'oe Sihyŏng emerge as saviors, surrendering their lives rather than their religious faith. While avoiding the word "martyr" (*sun'gyoja*), writers portray them as martyrs for the king, the country, and the common people, extolled for a self-sacrifice greater than the individual, the family, and the religious community. Tonghak leaders are glorified, imbued with a lack of self-interest, forgoing comfort to assist their country threatened by foreign religion, government corruption, and imperial aggression. They present these individual figures as inspirational heroes to the community, examples to believers and non-believers of the powers of the religious practice.

The first Tonghak-written history, *Ch'oe sŏnsaeng munjip towŏn kisŏ* (Collection of Master Ch'oe's works on the origin of the Way), was composed in the 1880s. It depicts the life of the founder, his spiritual revelations and religious powers, and his execution before narrating the survival of the community in the late 1860s and 1870s under Ch'oe Sihyŏng. Another important religious and hagiographic work, *Ch'ŏnyak chongjŏng pŏmnye* (Religious orthodoxy of the heavenly covenant), published in 1907 upon Tonghak's transformation into Ch'ŏndogyo (Religion of the heavenly way), elaborated on the teachings of the leaders and contained simple descriptions of the martyrdom of these Tonghak figures. The *Collection of Master Ch'oe's Works on the Origin of the Way* will be examined briefly to highlight the importance of these texts to the early religious community as well as their roles in the construction of a Tonghak and Ch'ŏndogyo identity that revolved around the martyrdom of the patriarchs. Key to understanding Tonghak evolution, these texts such as the *Collection of Master Ch'oe's Works on the Origin of the Way* discuss an early group of followers struggling to preserve membership, propagate the teachings, and

carve out a separate religious identity when other religious options may have seemed expedient and more appealing to potential followers.

These stories of self-sacrifice and martyrdom helped to assuage public suspicion of Tonghak as an illegal religion and the leadership as subversive to the state or as a treasonous movement in the wake of the 1894 rebellion. Outlawed in 1863, it was thought that the religious practices disappeared with the execution of the leader in 1864. Government officials targeted Tonghak followers in the 1890s, but when Tonghak reemerged in public, executions for the religion were rare, if practiced at all. An example is the Tonghak follower Yi P'ilje (1825–71), who led a local uprising in 1871 to exonerate Ch'oe Cheu. Arrested and transported to Sŏsomun in the capital, a site famous for Catholic martyrdoms and where Ch'oe Sihyŏng was executed in 1898, Yi was executed for his role in the disturbance and his head was displayed in public, but the government did not link him to Tonghak.[5] Unlike the Tonghak patriarch, Yi's death was not presented as evidence of martyrdom or celebrated as an inspirational story of devotion. Again, the government reiterated its ban in the 1890s, but only accelerated suppression of Tonghak when certain religious members rallied peasant troops en masse to capture the provincial capital of Chŏnju. It was the top leadership the government was more interested in uncovering and executing rather than the laity. This reality is reflected in the *Collection of Master Ch'oe's Works on the Origin of the Way* and the *Religious Orthodoxy of the Heavenly Covenant*. Martyr-like narratives, embedded in these longer religious histories, involved the leaders of early Tonghak, not ordinary followers whom the government let off or exiled, if punished at all. The depiction of the deaths of the patriarchs was interpreted for the Tonghak community as a discursive means to control individual religious behavior. [6] Transmitted through written texts, and probably orally, stories about Ch'oe Cheu's execution demonstrated his devout nature. Not only was he brave in his confrontation with the government, he also sacrificed his life rather than his religious beliefs. These stories of Ch'oe Cheu's and Ch'oe Sihyŏng's hardships are reiterated in Ch'ŏndogyo sources into the twentieth-first century.[7]

The sense of heightened struggle, both real and imagined, can serve as a way to rally supporters to a cause. This was true of Tonghak. The construction of martyrdom was a powerful message. It helped unify members across social status and geographical location. These early narratives of the religious leaders elevated Ch'oe Cheu and Ch'oe Sihyŏng to god-like statuses underscoring

their unflinching convictions in the face of persecution. The deployment of these Tonghak martyrs in texts energized followers and others interested in the religion, helping the community remain relevant as powerful social, political, and economic forces transformed the Korean landscape. This chapter argues that the rehabilitation of the leadership through hagiographic stories that included martyrdom helped the religion survive by propelling Tonghak into the political realm by the 1890s as writers identified the connection of the Tonghak religious message to the leadership's desire to assist the people and preserve the country through self-sacrifice. These became powerful stories for religious followers and potential believers, while they later were incorporated into stories of national salvation during the Colonial Period. Religious devotion and devotion to the country mixed into powerful imagery, helping to foster a particular sense of Tonghak identity that demarcated the religious community from other groups.

TONGHAK REVISITED

Tonghak is well known in North and South Korea as a popular rural religion from the second half of the nineteenth century. Although the founder was executed in 1864 and Tonghak was branded as heterodoxy, his followers continued practicing the religion into the twentieth century when the community split into several sects. Ch'ŏndogyo and Sich'ŏngyo are two of the better known but not the only religions that claimed Ch'oe as founder. Ch'ŏndogyo remains active in the twenty-first century, though its popularity has waned throughout the peninsula.[8] Ch'oe is a national icon in North and South Korea, viewed as a defender of Korea from imperialism who founded a religion that embodied social equality under a repressive government and class system. Tonghak's egalitarian thought, which resonated with the anti-establishment and pro-democracy movement in South Korea in the 1970s and 1980s, is part of the appeal. Another part is the involvement of his followers, especially the major Tonghak figure Chŏn Pongjun (1855–95), in the Tonghak rebellion, which sparked the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), both significant events in Korea's early modern period.

Tonghak evolved from a set of house rules into a wide-scale religious community from 1860 until the late nineteenth century. In formulating his ritual, Ch'oe Cheu drew on various currents of East Asian thought, including the

Daoist elixirs of immortality, Confucian morality, Buddhist thought, and popular Catholic notions of God. In so doing, he accomplished something very new by connecting Korea to a larger religious world, while simultaneously placing Korea at the center. He argued the superiority of Korea over other lands, his hometown Kyŏngju over the capital Seoul, and himself over all others. Tonghak doctrine advanced a Korea-centered cosmology. It relied upon geomantic and Confucian theories of political legitimacy and social stability. Anchoring this Tonghak cosmology was a belief in God. This God—Sangje in classical Chinese or Hanullim in vernacular Korean—was the same as the Western deity, Ch'oe Cheu explained in his works, but according to Ch'oe the West failed to understand Him. According to Tonghak, God appeared in the East, not the West. Ch'oe was most likely influenced by Catholicism here, but he described his new Tonghak faith as the antithesis to Western Learning. Perhaps a political message behind Tonghak contributed to the community's early success. Some followers were probably attracted to the anti-Catholic or egalitarian messages of the teaching. When Ch'oe first began propagating his new ideas in 1861, Tonghak attracted a wide range of believers, including peasants, slaves, and even elite yangban literati. Only when the government arrested Ch'oe and other followers in 1864, executed him, and attacked the religion as heterodoxy did interest in the religion come under control during this early period.

Studies on Tonghak largely identify two major causes for the rise of the religion and the outbreak of the rebellion. Many scholars point to the anti-Western nature in the works of Ch'oe Cheu. Tonghak, or Eastern Learning, as a reaction to Western Learning, or Catholicism, believed that God had appeared to Ch'oe in 1860 and chose him to spread the teaching and save Korea from Western religion and military aggression. Scholars also point out that Ch'oe, critical of the social inequalities of Chosŏn Dynasty, founded a religion that advocated egalitarianism. Tonghak suggested that anyone, regardless of social background, could hear God's voice and attain enlightenment.

For most of the nineteenth century, the Tonghaks avoided conflict. Ch'oe Cheu may have created Tonghak because he opposed Catholicism and the West, but his followers found in his ideas a variety of religious messages, most of them of a personal nature that helped them understand the upheavals of their times. Rather than social and political reform, Ch'oe's teaching emphasized health and family salvation. During Ch'oe's lifetime, the most

attractive aspect of his teaching was the talisman, a mystical ritual that promised to cure practitioners of physical ailments. This magical charm, when written out and recited, or sometimes burned and its ashes drunk with water, promised to restore health and help the individual attain enlightenment. Ch'oe offered his new teaching as a way to help people recover health, which in turn he suggested would save the dynasty, not topple it. But if this talisman was passed down from God to Ch'oe and then to the people, Tonghak also taught that the state no longer played a role in bringing comfort to the masses. Instead, followers were to turn to Ch'oe and his doctrine for answers. Tonghak rituals would bring security to the people because the government was unable to provide support.

SURVIVAL THROUGH MARTYRDOM: RESURRECTING THE TONGHAK FAITH

A major part of Tonghak's revival at the end of the nineteenth century was the composition of religious texts. Through the efforts of the new patriarch Ch'oe Sihyŏng and a handful of other believers, the religion reemerged in 1880 with new leadership that, recognizing the need for a written canon, much as the Buddhists and the Christians had, compiled the words of the founder into two collections, the *Tonggyŏng taejŏn* (Eastern scripture) in classical Chinese (hanmun) and the *Yongdam yusa* (Songs of Yongdam) in the vernacular.[9] These two canonical works of essays and poems contained autobiographical accounts and teachings of the founder from his religious awakening in 1860 until 1863. Along with this significant step was the compilation of non-doctrinal narratives in classical Chinese around the same time, the *Suun haengnok* (Biographical record of Suun) and the *Collection of Master Ch'oe's Works on the Origin of the Way*. Both texts depict many of the same stories, but the *Biographical Record of Suun* ends with the execution of Ch'oe while the *Collection of Master Ch'oe's Works on the Origin of the Way* narrates the Tonghak experience more than a decade following his death. These religious histories that Tonghak leaders compiled strengthened the argument against the government, positioning the texts as rejoinders to accusations leveled at Ch'oe Cheu, and emboldened certain members of the community to take action politically to correct what they saw as the divide between central policy outlawing Tonghak and opposing beliefs within the community. They also

illustrate the nature of Ch'oe's martyrdom as important to the contemporary Tonghak leadership.

In *Collection of Master Ch'oe's Works on the Origin of the Way*, writers sketched the biography of the founder, much of it gleaned from Ch'oe's own writings, and embellished his early life. Beginning with his birth, they emphasized his intelligent and gentle nature: "[h]e was clever and bright. . . . His purpose was a peaceful life. He was broadminded and had great bearing. He was an educated person with a high mind." Despite the strength of his character, he was not blessed with good fortune and "after a few years, he sold off what he had and traveled in all directions . . . and as the years gradually passed, he lacked a single ambition . . . and he lamented over his failures and lack of abilities."[10] This description anchored readers in an understanding of Ch'oe's superior nature, legitimizing his yangban status. The themes of intelligence, education, and peacefulness supported the view of his personal strengths juxtaposed with external troubles of economic hardships and uncertainties. Writers might have been hoping to connect with readers through a sense of commonality, experiences shared with yangban like him, commoners, and others in the countryside who struggled through events beyond their control, some social, others financial. He, like they, lived through hardships in the countryside, images of uncertainty Tonghak writers mobilized to win converts while challenging the government description of him. Rather than foster social instability, as the government argued, Ch'oe was caught up in it.

The intent of these non-doctrinal writings was to explicate Ch'oe's religious nature as God's confidant, highlighted in the work by certain mystical incidents he was said to have encountered before his spiritual revelation. Directionless, Ch'oe turned inward for answers to the problems he experienced. Ruminating upon his life, he searched the mountainsides, locations familiar to many seeking religious respite at Buddhist temples, many of which were located in mountainous regions. Once, when living in the mountains, Ch'oe was unexpectedly visited by a Buddhist monk seeking advice on a mysterious text the other monks at a temple had discovered but had been unable to interpret. The monk said, "I'll stay for three days. Will you be able to solve this nagging question?" Ch'oe accepted the book, contemplated its meaning, and before the night was out, he solved the riddle: "[t]he monk returned and asked, 'I have come to see if you understand it?' Our Master replied, 'I understand it.' The monk bowed a hundred times, thanking him courteously and

said, 'The truth of this writing is what heaven has passed onto you.' [The monk] headed down the stone steps and, after several paces, vanished."[11] The book, "the truth from heaven," imparted in Ch'oe a "long lasting spiritual uniqueness," a sign from a heavenly person. The depiction of the monk's visit evinced to readers that Ch'oe was not just a well-educated *yangban* fallen on hard times or a person suffering from uncertainties of life, but he held the ability to connect with mystical powers beyond this world. Through his keen intellect, Ch'oe solved questions that monks from the earthly realm in the temple and the visiting monk from the mystical world had failed to decipher.

Other episodes in the non-doctrinal works reinforced the perception of Ch'oe's religious abilities. Shortly after his experience on the mountain, he returned to his home outside of Kyŏngju. Still in economic constraints, he decided to sell some of the land he inherited from his father, but the local magistrate intervened to block the sale, arguing that the land had reverted back to the government, a subtle accusation of local government corruption. When an elderly village woman intruded onto the land to begin working it, Ch'oe struck her, apparently killing her. Shouting "Mother has died!" her sons captured Ch'oe and threatened to turn him over to the magistrate. After calmly telling them that he had the power to bring her back from the dead, he examined her pulse and stroked her body. The writers describe an esoteric religious ritual he spontaneously employed: "[u]sing a pheasant's tail, he shook it on her throat, waited a moment, then from inside her throat came sounds of breathing. She spit up a clot of blood which he wiped off her shoulder. Good fortune had returned! Our Master summoned her sons, and he gave her clean water. Suddenly, completely alive, she turned her body and sat up."[12] With the woman's revival, Ch'oe was exonerated. He earned the title "Divine Brightness" and his reputation as a religious being began to emerge. This scene touched on issues of the body, a central focus of Tonghak ritual. Unlike the previous account of the mystical book, the writers provided a more familiar example, of Ch'oe Cheu engaging with fellow villagers and applying his intellect and innate knowledge of ritual to the human body. He first struck the woman out of frustration with the local government official and filial piety to protect the physical possession his father passed down to him. Moreover, it was the magistrate that harmed her rather than Ch'oe, an example of local economic corruption involving property rights and land ownership between public and private interests. The writers portrayed Ch'oe as a humane man

with the power to heal physical suffering by conducting a religious ritual with a pheasant's tail.

The third story connected the earlier two motifs of writing and ritual involving the body. Ch'oe received a talisman from God, who ordered him to write out the special characters on a slip of paper, burn it, and drink the ashes in water. God told him, "[i]f I am God, then you are my son and you will call me Father."[13] When Ch'oe called out "Father," God interpreted the talisman as "a remedy for death." Referring to God as Father is another reflection of the Catholic influence. After accepting God's instructions, he wrote out the characters, burned them, and consumed the ashes in water. Upon doing so, his body strengthened and his health improved. Here, as well as several other places in *Collection of Master Ch'oe's Works on the Origin of the Way* and the *Bibliographical Record of Suun*, Ch'oe addresses God as Father. Readers connected the monk from heaven of the first episode with the heavenly Father of this incident. Ch'oe was born with a gift from heaven and, as the son of God, he deployed the power of heaven for the good of the people around him. In later episodes, writers expanded on Ch'oe's supernatural abilities. In one such story, while riding a horse across a river, to the amazement of all, his clothes and body remained dry, as though he had ridden on the surface of the water.[14]

The stories concerning Ch'oe Cheu's life and religious awakening prepared readers for an explanation of his encounter with central authorities and his transformation into a martyr. The community was well aware of Ch'oe's arrest and execution. Public announcements of his criminality made by branding him a criminal, executing him, and displaying his head were intended to foster fear and deter others from practicing his teaching. This knowledge circulated among followers. To dispute the government interpretation, the new Tonghak leadership needed an opposing description of the immediate events leading to his arrest and execution. To do this, writers of the *Collection of Master Ch'oe's Works on the Origin of the Way* elaborated on his arrest from the community's perspective:

> People of the Way from Kyŏngju came and talked to our Master. "We heard just now that there's discussion at court about doing harm to you. It would be good for our Master to escape." Our Master replied, "As for the Way, I brought it forth on my own, so rather I am the one to be punished. Why

> should I extend this to my pupils?" He did not listen to their words. This night, [the central government official] led many soldiers. They suddenly rushed in, announced that they had a royal decree, and captured our Master. As for the authority of a royal decree, there is no remedy or alternative! He obediently obeyed the royal decree and was arrested.[15]

Depicted in self-sacrificing terms, Ch'oe began to emerge as a martyr. Rather than escape when given an opportunity, he permitted his arrest without contestation. While government soldiers arrived in great number, without fear for his life, only concern for the lives of his followers, Ch'oe surrendered to the soldiers and the government official without fight or flight. The deference he held for the royal order of his arrest was a powerful example for believers. Even when faced with legal unjustness, he submitted to worldly structures of legal and moral authority rather than challenge them.

After Ch'oe's arrest, the narrator situated readers within the interrogation room where Ch'oe was depicted as denying the charge of harming the people, of which the government accused him. He did not demure when confronted with accusations of improper ritual practice: "[t]he official asked, 'why did you form a cult and corrupt and upset customs?' Our Master replied, 'I taught the people to recite the incantation and without using medicine, it was effective. I encouraged children to write, so they could become wise on their own. I made my occupation from these and passed the years and months. How could these harm customs?'"[16] The interrogation led to torture and the fracturing of his bones, another aspect of body and the government's indiscriminate regard for his: "[t]he official summoned our Master, but suddenly there was a sound like thunder while interrogating him. The official was surprised and asked the guard, '[h]ow can the sound be so powerful underneath the wooden club?' The soldier replied, '[t]he criminal's thigh snapped.' [Upon this revelation,] he ordered the local clerk to immediately take him [Ch'oe] to jail."[17] Ch'oe's final martyrdom, an indescribable act, was expressed in passive, deferential language: "[o]ur Master received the disgrace and departed from the world."[18]

To situate his martyrdom within the needs of the community, writers couched his death in religious symbolism. Following his execution and the recovery of the corpse, his body was described as remaining fresh and his skin lifelike for several days, claims made for a number of Catholic martyrs.

En route to Yongdam, his followers stopped overnight and placed his body in a guesthouse, where later that evening bright lights and swirling clouds enveloped the hut where he lay, and it was only that evening that his spirit ascended to heaven, and his body began to decay:

> [t]hey stayed there and protected the corpse for three days, waiting for a miracle [*yŏnghŏm*]. From the pond, a double rainbow appeared leading to heaven, clouds and fog encircled the pond and the inn, and various colors shined brightly for three consecutive days. Our Master ascended to heaven and the clouds rolled up and the rainbow disappeared. After this, the corpse began to discharge an odor, and his students washed and dressed the body again.[19]

These religious episodes served as rhetorical tools to persuade readers of Ch'oe Cheu's divine uniqueness. Nothing in the non-doctrinal works substantiated the government narrative of Ch'oe as a criminal who was deceiving the people. Rather than harming the customs and traditions of the land, as the government argued, Ch'oe and his teachings were seen as helping the people cure the sick and even restore life to the dead. The writers constructed stories about Ch'oe to dispute the government claim that he was a simple criminal set on harming the people. Not only did he have the intellect to decipher unintelligible texts, but he also held religious powers conferred upon him by God. As the son of God, he appeared to represent the earthly manifestation of heaven and, like Jesus, Ch'oe Cheu was a savior, a martyr, and a messenger of God; misunderstood by the authorities, and through God, he could overcome death. The writers used him as an example of the capacity of Tonghak ritual to overcome worldly suffering.

As mentioned above, it is unclear if Tonghak had direct contact with Catholicism, though this is likely. In many of his works, Ch'oe Cheu sharply criticized Catholic practices and Westerners, and later Ch'ŏndogyo reiterated the rational for Tonghak as an answer to Western Learning. Still, there were striking parallels between Ch'oe and Catholicism's description of God, as well as other myth-building stories around him. Furthermore, it is hard to ignore Ch'oe's Jesus-like aspects in the narratives of *Biographical Record of Suun* and the *Collection of Master Ch'oe's Works on the Origin of the Way*. By Ch'oe Sihyŏng's time, the *New Testament* had been translated into Korean. How Tonghak writers may have been impacted by the Bible is difficult to ascertain.

In their non-doctrinal works, the writers elevated Ch'oe to a position above all others in the world, second only to God. Certain hints suggest that Catholicism influenced Ch'oe Cheu and that it continued to influence Tonghak leaders like Ch'oe Sihyŏng. Ch'oe Cheu utilized the concept of a personified heaven to describe God and the second leader tapped into the image of an executed "criminal" to further legitimize their religious teachings. The two non-doctrinal texts spread the Tonghak teachings within the community and beyond, offered a nuanced interpretation to the government ban against an outlawed practice, and set up Tonghak as the equal of Christianity.

CONCLUSION

The composition of religious hagiographies that included the martyrdom of the patriarch was a fundamental imperative of the community for perpetuating the religious teachings. They promoted the survival of Tonghak after the execution of the founder when the religious community had been thinned out by government proscription and a dispersed leadership. The works served as a way to re-energize the founder's message reinterpreted through new leadership that began to propagate by word of mouth and the circulation of these texts. Followers found in these Tonghak works a variety of messages. Followers participated in ritual, read the texts, and got out of these Tonghak works what they found most important to their own lives. In the early period of the community, that message was one of personal health. Part of the resurgence was the leadership's push back against government accusations against the founder. They attempted to justify their position by claiming Ch'oe's moral and religious superiority demonstrated by his self-sacrifice and martyrdom. By the 1890s, the circulation of rituals and texts produced a strong bond within the community that crossed regions and social backgrounds, energizing believers to unify and take political action to legalize the practice of Tonghak, among other demands.

These stories of survival and martyrdom of the patriarch became templates for later discussions. Following the splintering of Tonghak after the rebellion, the execution of Ch'oe Sihyŏng in 1898 over ritual violation, and the founding of Ch'ŏndogyo, the struggle to claim ownership over early Tonghak led writers to trace their direct legacy to Ch'oe Cheu. In works such as *Religious*

Orthodoxy of the Heavenly Covenant, published in 1907, writers reiterated with greater detail Ch'oe Cheu's religious experiences and conversations with God, as well as Ch'oe Sihyŏng's leadership role from the 1870s to 1890s. This was vital for defending the Ch'ŏndogyo claim to the founder when other breakaway branches were doing the same. The writers glossed over the suffering of the founder after his arrest and only described his execution in non-descriptive terminology: "[o]ur Great Leader sacrificed his life in Taegu."[20] The background of the 1894 Tonghak rebellion painted a dire social situation, when the tyranny of government officials spread "like a growing fire."[21] Tonghak followers, the writers continued, wished to resolve the issue of persecution. Ch'oe Sihyŏng's actions were described in benevolent terms, connecting the legacy of "our Way" to the Chinese philosopher Mencius and the legendary sage kings Yao and Shun, as a martyr for the Tonghak community and defender of the ancient ways of East Asia.[22] Ch'oe Sihyŏng was captured on his way to the capital and later "gave his life" and died from hanging (*kyohyŏng*).[23] Though stressing his martyrdom to the community, unlike the founder's execution, the writers in this 1907 work described the second leader's death more graphically.

It is important to situate these Tonghak stories in the broader context of events in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Korea. In the wake of the Chosŏn government's persecution of Tonghak and the full arrival of Japanese imperialism, the stories reflected the values Tonghak writers wished to inculcate among followers. The problems identified in the writings reflected the socio-political trauma of the country. The overarching values were loyalty, perseverance, and obligation. Readers were to replicate the deep commitment Tonghak patriarchs displayed. In the hardships and uncertainties of the times, the stories of the commitment, sacrifice, and martyrdom of these leaders helped unify the community. Followers were to carry these stories with them to encourage their commitment to the community and thereby provide themselves with a sense of religious comfort during demanding times.

The narratives within these texts also evince the formation of a Tonghak identity. Commitment to religious teaching, survival, suffering, and sacrifice were important attributes to Tonghak writers, as well as humility, kindness, and reverence for heaven, values they emphasized throughout their works. While martyrdom stories only involved the patriarchs rather than the laity, the

same values extolled in the stories of Ch'oe Cheu and Ch'oe Sihyŏng—who suffered for the propagation of the religious messages—were important signs of the cares and concerns of the writers. These stories helped the community fathom the loss of their patriarchs, and later, their country through Japanese imperialism, by placing upon their leaders' deaths moral and didactic meanings that followers could interpret in multiple ways.

NOTES

1. The lunar date was the twelfth month, tenth day of *kaehae* year (1863). Ch'oe Cheu's birth name (*amyŏng*) was Poksul, the name used in government sources, but in 1860 he adopted an official title (*kwanmyŏng*) Cheu, "to save the foolish," along with his penname (*myŏng*) Suun.

2. Descriptions of the arrest, interrogation and execution of Ch'oe Cheu and other Tonghak followers are found in several government compilations, but here I rely upon extracts from the *sillok* reprinted in Chang Hŭihŭng, ed., "*Kojong Sunjong sillok* chung Tonghak kwallyŏn kisa" [Tonghak-related records in the *Kojong* and *Sunjong sillok*], 141–302. Passages from the *Kojong sillok* describe the investigation, arrest, interrogation, and execution of Ch'oe Cheu, while also including transcripts from interrogations of nine other Tonghak followers.

3. *Kojong Sunjong Sillok* [Veritable records of Kojong and Sunjong], 1406.

4. For scholarship on martyrdom, see Shannon Dunn, "The Female Martyr and the Politics of Death," 202–25; Louis E. Fenech, "Martyrdom and the Sikh Tradition," 623–42; Isabelle Heullant-Donat, "Martyrdom and Identity in the Franciscan Order," 429–53; and Clive Willis, "The Martyrdom of Father Marcello Mastrilli S. J.," 215–25. See also Kang Sŏkchin, "Sipgu segi Chosŏn Kyohoe sun'gyojadŭl ŭi salm kwa yŏngsŏng" [Life and spirituality of Chosŏn martyrs in the nineteenth century], 89–123.

5. "Ch'oe Sŏnsaeng munjip towŏn kisŏ" [Collection of Master Ch'oe's works on the origin of the Way] reprinted in *Tonghak nongmin undong py'ŏn* [Writings on the Tonghak peasant movement], edited by Kukhak Chinhŭng Yŏn'gu Saŏp Ch'ujin Wiwŏnhoe, 225–26; and *Kojong Sunjong sillok*, sang, 381b.

6. See Maureen A. Tilley, "Scripture as an Element of Social Control," 383.

7. For instance, see Ch'ŏndogyo, *Ch'ŏndogyo yaksa* [Short history of Ch'ŏndogyo].

8. Carl Young, "Into the Sunset: Ch'ŏndogyo in North Korea, 1945–1950," 51–66.

9. Tonghak and Ch'ŏndogyo histories claim Ch'oe Sihyŏng took over the leadership of Tonghak with the approval of Ch'oe Cheu. For instance, see Yi Tonhwa, *Ch'ŏndogyo ch'anggŏnsa* [Founding history of Ch'ŏndogyo], chapter 2, page 3.

10. Kim Sanggi, "Suun haengnok" [Biographic record of Suun], 178.

11. Ibid., 178.

12. *Ch'oe Sŏnsaeng munjip towŏn kisŏ*, 181.
13. Ibid., 184.
14. Ibid, 186.
15. Ibid, 206–7.
16. Ibid, 210.
17. Ibid, 210.
18. Ibid, 211.
19. Ibid., 212.
20. *Ch'ŏnyak chongjŏng* [Religious orthodoxy of the heavenly covenant], 19, reprinted in Ch'oe Kiyong and Pak Maengsu, eds, *Hanmal Ch'ŏndogyo charyojip* [Collected documents of Ch'ŏndogyo of the Hanmal period] Vol. 1.
21. Ibid, 38.
22. Ibid, 42.
23. Ibid, 47.

4

Choosing to Die: Catholic Voluntary Martyrdom in Late Chosŏn Korea

FRANKLIN RAUSCH

Ambrose Kim Sebak (1761–1828) initially fled when an anti-Catholic persecution broke out in 1827, but then chose to give himself up. He was thrown in prison and tortured. When he was sentenced to death, he stopped eating, both to fast as a Catholic devotional practice and because he did not want to be a burden on the impoverished taxpayers who paid for his meals. Other Catholics imprisoned with Ambrose began to imitate him, but Ambrose told them not to, as refusing to eat would be tantamount to suicide, and then gave his companions, who apparently were not sentenced to death, food with his own hands.[1] The conditions of prison life, exacerbated by this fast, would prove too much for sixty-seven-year-old Ambrose, and he died before his sentence was carried out.[2] Twelve years later, Protasius Chŏng Kukpo (1799–1839) prostrated himself outside of the Board of Punishments and appealed to the Minister of War that he be executed for the crime of forsaking God when he apostatized just days before. He was told he was mad and dismissed. But Protasius persisted and eventually, he too was thrown in prison and died there from a combination of beatings and poor health.[3] What led Catholics like Ambrose and Protasius to surrender themselves to the government rather than trying to stay alive through flight—an option allowed in Catholicism? How could Catholics who believed—as seen in the case of Ambrose, contrary to accepted morality in Chosŏn culture—that suicide was wrong, take actions that they knew would lead to their own deaths?[4]

In order to answer these questions, I will survey the lives and deaths of Catholics living in Korea from the late eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries who became voluntary martyrs. I will argue that for theological reasons, martyrdom was considered an honorable death and the highest form

of devotion to God, and that when personal circumstances encouraged Catholics to do so, they would willingly give themselves up to die. I will further argue that loyalty and devotion not only to God but to the Catholic community was of particular importance in driving voluntary martyrdom, particularly when that community was principally experienced through a potential martyr's family. Moreover, by exploring a representative sampling of these instances of voluntary martyrdom, we can better understand the ambiguous nature of martyrdom as both something at variance with Chosŏn values and, at the same time, as shaped and encouraged by them.

CHRISTIAN MARTYRDOM AND CHOSŎN VALUES

Before examining instances of Catholic martyrdom in Korea, it is necessary to briefly discuss the theology underpinning it. The Catholic Church has traditionally understood martyrdom as dying for God in imitation of Jesus of Nazareth. Just as Jesus died out of obedience to the Father's will, Christians should take up their crosses and follow him.[5] At the same time, there are key differences between the death of Jesus and that of a martyr. For one, Jesus is understood to be both fully man and fully God, an ontological status that enables his death to open the possibility of redemption for all humanity. In contrast, martyrs were only human and their deaths could not redeem themselves or others from sin, rather, they enabled the martyr to take full advantage of Jesus' redemptive death, providing an honored place in heaven. Moreover, the word "martyr" literally means "witness" in Greek, and a Catholic martyr was understood, through his or her death, to be providing a public confession of trust in Jesus and his promise of heavenly rewards for those who stayed faithful to him. It was hoped that such public witness would convince others of the truth of the faith, leading to their conversion. However, the cause of death of both Jesus and the martyrs was seen as fundamentally the same—the result of the battle between the demands of the "world" (ruled by Satan) and of God, with martyrs being those who had, like Christ, overcome the world and its temptations to empty pleasures for the true good of heaven. Thus, when Catholics were confronted with the choice of giving up their faith in Jesus or dying, they were expected to choose the latter. Doing otherwise would be a betrayal of God and a victory for the devil. Martyrs were thus understood to be heroes of the Church, with many being recognized as

saints who were believed to have the power to intercede with God for the faithful on earth and who were publicly celebrated as models worthy of imitation.[6]

Korean Catholics were exposed to this tradition of martyrdom. Through books in Chinese and the Korean vernacular Korean Catholics learned about the lives of the saints, including those who died for their faith, such as Saint Agatha, a virgin martyr who was an inspiration for the voluntary martyr Luthgarde Yi Suni (1782–1801). Moreover, Korean Catholics understood the meaning of martyrdom and of the need to imitate Jesus in his suffering and death, as seen in the tendency of writings by and about Korean martyrs to compare their sufferings to those of Christ.[7]

The fact that Korean Catholics desired such a death can be seen in such statements as Damian Nam Myŏnghyŏk's declaration to his wife Maria Yi Yŏnhŭi during the 1839 persecution that "[i]t is the rightful portion of the saint to die like a lamb for the Lord. We should not lose this excellent opportunity [to be martyrs]." Damian and Maria availed themselves of this opportunity and both died as martyrs.[8] It might seem somewhat curious that martyrdom was referred to as an "opportunity" here, but this phrasing was actually quite common. It reflected the Catholic emphasis on moral frailty and the difficulty in overcoming the three enemies—the flesh, the world, and the devil—and obtain heaven.[9] Martyrdom might not be the only path to heaven, but, in a fallen world inhabited by weak human beings, it was the safest and surest route. These values would only have been strengthened by the arrival of French missionaries of the MEP (*Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris*, Paris Foreign Missions Society) in 1836, as these priests themselves had a strong devotion to martyrdom and actively sought out the most dangerous of missions so that they could be honored with such a death.[10]

This exaltation of martyrdom placed Catholics outside the bounds of traditional morality in Chosŏn Korea. This world, not the next, was the focus of Confucian orthodoxy, leading to scholarly criticism of the Catholic emphasis on heaven and the willingness of Catholics to die. Confucians expected people to do their best to stay alive and fulfill their social obligations, such as taking care of their aged parents. At the same time, unlike Catholicism, Chosŏn morality held that there were times when taking one's life was not only appropriate, but an honorable act. For instance, as seen in this volume, women might commit suicide to prove or protect their chastity.[11] Likewise, government officials who killed themselves during the seventeenth-century

struggle against the Qing were accorded official praise. These acts of suicide upheld state-supported values of chastity and loyalty and strengthened group bonds and devotion to the dynasty and the family. In contrast, from the perspectives of dedicated Confucians, Catholics appeared selfish for their desire for heavenly rewards rather than for the good of the group.[12]

At the same time, we must not overlook the similarities between Catholic and Chosŏn values or the fact that Catholics still accepted certain aspects of Chosŏn morality. Both the Chosŏn state and the Catholic Church held that the preservation of virtue was more important than life. For instance, both Catholic and non-Catholic Koreans recognized that loyalty to a superior was both right and good, and that recognizing someone for such loyalty was quite natural. In fact, Catholic teaching in Korea, as illustrated by the catechism written by the martyr Augustine Chŏng Yakchong (1761–1801), drew upon traditional ideas of loyalty to the king to encourage an even greater loyalty to God.[13] Moreover, both connected violence with sincerity—the willingness to suffer showed one's true loyalty and devotion. Thus, Maria Yi Yŏngdŏk wrote a letter in blood to her father in an (unsuccessful) attempt to convince him to allow her to live as a perpetual virgin rather than marry.[14] Even Alexius Hwang Sayŏng, who sought to organize a papal naval expedition to force the Korean government to stop persecuting Catholics, wrote in praiseworthy terms of the ancestors of one Catholic who chose to commit suicide as an act of resistance against Manchu invaders, though he did not explicitly approve of the act of suicide itself.[15]

Chosŏn literature is full of stories of filial children, loyal subjects, and chaste wives who suffered out of devotion to their parents, rulers, and husbands. These values resonated deeply in Chosŏn society and gave those who adhered to them a sense of meaning and dignity that helped them manage the suffering that might accompany the difficulties of, for example, supporting and taking care of aged parents when one was poor. Korean Catholicism echoed and supported these values—after all, the initial attraction of Koreans for the new religion was its promise to help them be better Confucians.[16] Catholics would also expand and reinterpret these values. The Catholic practice of referring to God in parental terms (often literally as "The Great Parent"), would have focused these emotional ties of devotion, meaning, and human dignity onto God.[17] And just as it was understood that children were to suffer violence, even death, out of filial piety toward their parents who had

given them bodily life, how much more should these sacrifices be made to the Lord who had given them eternal life?

Catholics therefore inherited from both their Confucian and their Catholic patrimony a belief in the importance of virtue, the need to adhere to the good even in the midst of suffering, that such suffering was proof of one's sincere devotion, and that this devotion was understood as principally being aimed at one's superiors—parents and king for Confucians—with Catholics also seeing God as the proper object of one's highest devotion. While Confucians might find it necessary to kill themselves to fulfill these obligations, and see such a death as honorable, this was not an option for Catholics. Suicide was fundamentally different from the death of Jesus, who passively awaited arrest and accepted his death without resistance. In fact, traditionally, Catholics were urged to flee persecution, to try and stay alive and to only allow themselves to be killed for the faith when the only other option was to deny Christ.[18] While it is not clear how much Korean Catholics understood with regards to when martyrdom was acceptable, some did have theological scruples about surrendering themselves. At the same time, despite the fact the clergy knew how they should behave, some would still find reasons to give themselves up to the government rather than go into hiding.[19] Therefore, it is necessary before continuing to identify what is meant by the term "voluntary martyr."

Scholar of the early church, Candida Moss, defines a voluntary martyr as someone who brings about "martyrdom either by presenting oneself to authorities or by the unsolicited disclosure of one's Christian identity."[20] I will follow this definition in general, but, in order to capture the diversity of voluntary martyrdom in Korea, I will include another category: passive voluntary martyrs. Passive voluntary martyrs are those who had the opportunity to escape arrest without denying their Catholic faith but chose not to. Following this definition, I have collected a representative sampling of voluntary martyrs throughout the late Chosŏn period. It is significant to note that I was only able to find such martyrs during times of actual persecution—I could find no instances of Catholics in Korea surrendering themselves to the government during a time when there was not already a persecution in progress. Thus, the vast majority of the voluntary martyrs examined here died in 1801, 1815, 1827, 1839, and from 1866 to 1868, with a few dying during minor anti-Catholic incidents in such years as 1795 and 1797.

VOLUNTARY MARTYRS

Before examining individual cases of voluntary martyrdom, by way of comparison, it would be useful to briefly summarize an example of a "standard" story of martyrdom as illustrated by the hagiography of Columba Kang Wansuk (1761–1801) that was recorded in the *Paeksŏ* (The silk letter), a record of the 1801 persecution written by Alexius Hwang Sayŏng.[21] Typically, the sex, personality, social status, and how the martyr first became a Catholic was discussed. For instance, Columba was described as "articulate and brave" and never wanting "anything other than what was right and proper."[22] It was also noted that she was a woman born of a yangban father and a non-yangban mother and that she converted to Catholicism after she married. A hagiography would then note some interesting aspects about the Catholic, in this case Columba's role as a leader of the Korean Catholic Church who used her yangban status to protect Father Zhou Wenmo, a missionary priest from China. The details of the martyr's arrest would then be described. In Columba's case, very little information about her arrest was given, as there was nothing much of interest to report, indicating that she was not a voluntary martyr (typically such a fact was considered noteworthy and reported). Whatever the status of a martyr, hagiographies typically concentrate on how the martyr behaved under torture, responded to requests to reject Catholicism, and faced execution. In Columba's case, her refusal to reveal the location of Father Zhou was singled out, as was the fact that despite being tortured several times, "her voice and complexion never changed." It was also recorded that her guards exclaimed that the she was "a god, not a person," owing to her ability to withstand pain. The standard hagiography usually ended with the matter of death and the age of the martyr at that time. Thus, Columba's reads, "In the end she was executed by decapitation. She was 41 years old."[23] When the date of execution was known, it was also provided.

Active Voluntary Martyrs

Columba, like most martyrs in Korea, did not choose when she was arrested, nor did she actively court martyrdom. Thus, Columba had done her best to stay alive and only accepted martyrdom when her only other choice was to forsake her faith and inform on Father Zhou. However, a minority of Catholic martyrs actively sought martyrdom. Thirty-five-year-old Lucia Chŏn volun-

tarily gave herself up and was executed in 1867.[24] Anthony Kim Wŏnbo did likewise in 1866.[25] Forty-five-year-old Luke Kim Sŏnggu initially fled from persecution but later gave himself up and was executed.[26] In 1867, after his father had been martyred, eighteen-year-old Francis Sŏ, in an apparently spontaneous act, gave himself up when he saw a group of constables on a road.[27] Thus voluntary martyrdom was practiced by both men and women of various ages.

While these cases offer very few details, there are several instances of voluntary martyrdom which are well documented. Perhaps the most active of voluntary martyrdoms described in extant records occurred in 1839 and involved a group of four women and one man surrendering themselves to the police. When the persecution of that year broke out, two sisters, Magdalene Yi Yŏnghŭi (1809–39, the younger sister and a perpetual virgin) and Barbara Yi Chŏnghŭi (1798–1839, the older sister, who before her marriage had hoped to be a perpetual virgin), their mother Magdalene Hŏ Kyeim (1773–1839, a devout Catholic who raised her children in the faith despite having a non-believing husband), as well as Martin Kim Sŏngim (1787–1839, a devout convert to Catholicism) and Lucia Kim (1818–39, a niece of the two sisters and a perpetual virgin who had lost her parents when she was fourteen) were together in Seoul.[28] When the persecution broke out, seeing that "nothing could be done" they swore to each other to give themselves up.[29] Together they went to a house where police remained after apprehending some Catholics and told the men that they were Catholics and should be arrested. At first, the police thought they were crazy and did not believe them, so they produced their rosaries and other holy items, at which point they were finally arrested. They were tortured multiple times and then asked if, now having suffered, they understood the errors of their ways. They responded, "[i]f we intended to reject the Lord, why would we have surrendered ourselves? . . . If the law says we should die, then we should die."[30] Despite being tortured more than others "because they had given themselves up," they all died as martyrs.

A simple reading of the record indicates that this group of Catholics chose to surrender because they did not see much of a chance of their being able to escape ("nothing could be done"). However, if we consider the identity of these voluntary martyrs, we can see that there might be additional reasons for their decision. First, as noted above, is the issue of perpetual virginity, which

was commonly taken as the next surest route to heaven after martyrdom.[31] The older sister, Barbara Yi Chŏnghŭi, was pressured by her non-Catholic father (deceased at the time of her martyrdom) to marry. She successfully delayed marriage by pretending to be ill, but in the end had to marry, her one consolation being that it was to a fellow Catholic. He died after only two years of conjugal life, and no children are mentioned from this union.[32] The younger sister, Magdalene Yi Yŏnghŭi, faked her own death, making it seem as if a tiger had eaten her, and ran off to live with her aunt, Theresa Yi Maeim, until her father relented and allowed her to remain single. These sisters, as evidenced by their desire for perpetual virginity and their willingness to go to extreme lengths to live out such a vocation, were clearly dedicated to heroic acts of Catholic piety. Lucia Kim too was a perpetual virgin. Martyrdom would therefore have likely been attractive to them. The sisters' mother Magdalene Hŏ herself probably admired perpetual virginity (the father is recorded as pressuring the daughters to marry, not her) and, being strong enough to not only pass on her faith in a mixed marriage and to undergo torture and execution at the advanced age of sixty-seven, would also likely have found martyrdom attractive. Martin's reasons are not so clear, but he was pious and so was willing to go along with the others. Thus, when faced with persecution, it would have made sense for such Catholics to actively embrace martyrdom and to do so in a way that would have provided the most powerful witness possible (as described above, this voluntary martyrdom did certainly make an impression on the police and their interrogators).

While these martyrs from 1839 seemingly decided to surrender together, in the case of a group of voluntary martyrs from 1801, it was a single powerful individual, Luthgarde Yi Suni, who led the way. Luthgarde was born into a poor yangban family distantly related to the royal house. The whole family converted to Catholicism while she was quite young. After her first communion, she experienced a state of ecstasy and made a promise of lifelong virginity.[33] As it was deemed too dangerous to the community to allow a young woman to remain publicly unmarried, Father James Zhou Wenmo, the first priest to serve the new Korean Catholic community, arranged for Luthgarde to marry a Catholic man, John Yu Chungch'ŏl (1779–1801), who also wanted to live as a perpetual virgin. They both promised to live together as brother and sister. However, in 1801, Luthgarde's father-in-law, an important Catholic leader, was arrested. Because he had been in contact with Catholics outside

the country, his crimes were deemed to be so serious that his whole family was punished: his son John would be executed and the women and children in his family, save for his elderly mother and aunt, would be made government slaves and banished.[34] When Luthgarde and other family members were assembled to be officially sent into banishment, she stated that they were all Catholics and demanded that they be executed "in accordance with the laws of the country." When the official ignored her, she rebuked him, saying, "[y]ou receive a salary from the state but do not follow the commands of the King."[35] Eventually, Luthgarde and the relatives jailed with her were executed as Catholics.[36]

Luthgarde, like the aforementioned Yi sisters and Lucia Kim, was a perpetual virgin and had already shown herself to be attracted to heroic forms of piety. In fact, in Luthgarde's prison letters she expressed her admiration for Saint Agatha, who herself was both a perpetual virgin and a martyr, tying together her own life and death with these two ideals of Catholic life. The choice before Luthgarde, who wrote movingly of martyrdom as a great spiritual good that would unite her with her beloved John and transform her so she could help her mother into heaven, was to continue walking in the path of Saint Agatha to martyrdom—or to banishment—which by this time was a punishment for apostate Catholics. While martyrdom would mean torture, suffering, and an early death, that was a cost Luthgarde had been preparing to pay through her practice of perpetual virginity. Her fellow relatives, inspired on by Luthgarde, maintained their faith and were martyred together with her.

Individuals could also follow a group into martyrdom voluntarily. Though born into a yangban family, Alexius Kim was very poor because the right side of his body was paralyzed making it difficult for him to work. His disability did not prevent Alexius from converting his sister, seeking to convert non-Catholics, and instructing Catholics in their faith. He survived through the charity of his fellow Catholics and also by copying books with his left hand. In 1815, police raided Alexius' village and his Catholic neighbors were arrested. As the constables prepared to leave with their prisoners Alexius yelled out that he was a Catholic and asked if it was because of his disability that he had been left alone. He was then arrested. While in prison, he tried to explain the Catholic faith to the provincial governor, infuriating the man so much that he had the guards break Alexius' jaw. That injury and subsequent

poor treatment led to his death in prison a few months later at the age of thirty-three.[37] It would seem that for Alexius, the arrest of his fellow believers meant that he would lose the community in which he not only found meaning, support, and acceptance, but in which he felt that he himself was an integral part. Being left behind would have led not only to the loss of the means of survival but would also mean isolation from his community—ignoble suffering and loneliness for him, glorious martyrdom for his friends. It was likely for these reasons, in addition to a general Catholic theological predilection to martyrdom, that he declared his own faith so that he could join his fellow Catholics in jail.

Voluntary martyrdom was also not simply a case of strong-minded individuals who unambiguously chose to give themselves up, as seen in the case of Barnabas Chŏng Kwangsu (?–1801). Barnabas and his wife Agatha Yun Chŏmhye (?–1801) were both converts to Catholicism; their non-Catholic parents opposed their marriage, causing them to strike out on their own. When the persecution of 1801 broke out, Agatha was arrested, and Barnabas fled for a while but eventually gave up and surrendered himself to the authorities and was subsequently martyred. This case is interesting in that, on one side, Barnabas was devout enough to pursue a life of faith with his wife despite his parents' opposition and was willing to give himself up and to hold on to the faith even though rejecting it would have saved his life. However, it was only after having fled for a time that he decided to surrender. Whether it was a desire to meet the same fate as his wife, the difficulty of surviving as a refugee, or some other cause, is not clear. What is manifest is that his first instinct was not to give himself up, but to flee, pointing to the mixed feelings and motives existing within voluntary martyrs. Thus, while not always mentioned explicitly in the hagiographies, it is important to keep in mind that making the decision to surrender voluntarily could be neither easy nor clear, and that more prosaic factors could contribute to the decision to surrender.

WIPING AWAY SHAME AND SIN: APOSTASY AND VOLUNTARY MARTYRDOM

Thus far, we have focused on the cases of voluntary martyrs who died heroically confessing their faith. The focus on such martyrdoms in Korean

Catholic history has led to a neglect of the fact that many Catholics repudiated their faith when faced with persecution. In particular, many of the early converts to Catholicism found it difficult to publicly confess their beliefs in the face of demands by both family and state, with the latter backed up with the added terror of torture and execution. While some who apostatized truly gave up the religion, others still believed in their hearts but found the pressure to repudiate Catholicism too heavy to withstand. Having never actually lost belief in the tenants of the faith, such people were quick to return to the practice of their religion once the pressure was off. However, guilt at having publicly repudiated God, to whom ultimate devotion was owed, when public witness to inspire the faithful and convert non-believers was called for, could plague them. This combination of guilt and shame led some Catholics to embrace voluntary martyrdom as a means of showing their true devotion, thus washing away their previous sin and the damage they had done to their community.

This desire to wipe away the shame of apostasy was likely the motivating factor behind the actions of Peter Ch'oe P'ilche, a pharmacist. Peter was arrested in 1791 and repudiated Catholicism. He returned to the Catholic community but still must have borne the shame of giving in. Peter was arrested again in 1800, and while in jail his father had fallen ill, converted to Catholicism, and died. His jailer allowed him to leave to attend the funeral and intimated to him that he did not need to come back. Peter chose to return and was later martyred. It is not clear why he came back and embraced voluntary martyrdom, especially as his mother and wife were still living, but there is a good chance that he did so in order to wipe away the shame and sin of having repudiated his faith. Father Zhou had told another Catholic in a similar situation that only martyrdom could make up for his public repudiation of Catholicism, so perhaps Peter was doing something similar.[38] Father Zhou's stance is somewhat curious—sacramental confession, something Father Zhou could have provided, should have been enough to forgive Peter's sins. Perhaps Father Zhou meant that only public witness to God, followed by martyrdom to seal that witness, could repair the damage apostasy had done to the community and to the faith, as giving in showed a lack of trust in God's promise of eternal life, which in turn hurt the morale of Catholic community and made it easier for non-believers to reject the faith. Whatever

Father Zhou said, for devoted Catholics, the stigma of apostasy must have weighed heavily and, psychologically speaking, only martyrdom could make up for it.

Peter Cho Yongsam (?–1801) provides a similar case. Peter was something of a laughingstock in his village and was looked down upon for his physical weakness, unattractive appearance, and seeming lack of intelligence. In contrast, Augustine Chŏng Yakchong (1760–1801), an important early Catholic leader, praised Peter for his devotion. This deep piety meant that when Peter was interrogated after being arrested for his Catholicism, he refused to cooperate. In response, his interrogator had his father beaten in front of him. Peter could not stand this and agreed to repudiate his faith. He was thereupon freed, but as he left the prison other Catholics called on him to retract his repudiation. He returned and did so, was thrown back in jail, and eventually died from the beatings he received there.[39]

Voluntary martyrdom to wipe away the shame of apostasy continued into the 1839 persecution, as seen in the case of Protasius Chŏng Kukpo briefly mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. The descendent of a great family that had fallen from grace, Protasius was said to be a humble man who converted to Catholicism in his thirties. He and his wife were both devout, and the French missionaries would often administer the sacraments at their house for other Catholics. Protasius and his wife were willing to risk the danger that arose from playing such a prominent role in the Catholic community and accept the hard work that accompanied it. What made this all the more remarkable was the poverty of their household and the poor health of the married couple. Protasius is remembered as being happy in his faith, likely because it helped him to make sense of these difficulties, and the pain that came from having no children live to adulthood despite his wife giving birth fourteen times. Thus, it is something of a surprise that despite resisting initial attempts to make him repudiate his faith after his arrest in the third month of 1839, after his being moved to the Board of Punishments, the personnel of which were perhaps more skilled at their work, he apostatized under torture.

Following his recantation, Protasius was immediately allowed to return home, but when he did, he was so wracked by guilt that he wept continuously and could not eat or sleep. After meeting a fellow Catholic, he deeply lamented his actions. Protasius could have sought confession if he merely

wanted his sins forgiven—having hosted the priests at his home often he would have been very familiar with the practice. However, he instead went to the office of the Board of Punishments and told the officials there that he had committed the sin of betraying his faith and so should die. They responded that he was crazy and ignored him. Protasius left but returned the following day and again was not able to convince them to arrest him. He went again on the third day. The minister of war went out in a palanquin to witness an execution and did not hear, or else ignored, Protasius' appeals. He waited, prostrate, for that official's return, and when the minister came back, once again asked that he be killed for the crime of betraying God. The minister told him he was crazy and to leave, but Protasius persisted, and in the end was arrested again and beaten. He died in prison shortly after that.[40] Having felt that they had betrayed Jesus, these martyrs made the ultimate, public act of trust in him by dying for him through voluntary martyrdom, wiping away the sin and shame of apostasy and healing the harm done to their community.

Such cases were not limited to men. Agatha Magdalene Kim Yundŏk (1765–1815), who converted to Catholicism as an adult, was arrested during the 1815 persecution. She initially maintained her faith but eventually apostatized and was released. As she was leaving the gates of the governor's office, another Catholic, Andrew Kim Chonghan (?–1816), who was being brought into the prison, told her not to miss such an "opportunity." Agatha Magdalene, inspired by Andrew's words, turned around, pushed her way past the guards, and told an official that she wanted to affirm her faith in Catholicism and that he could kill her if he liked. The official responded that she must be crazy and ordered that she be taken away. Agatha Magdalene shouted out again the abjuration of her apostasy, and the official had her beaten and thrown in jail. She would eventually die in prison at the age of fifty from the hardships she suffered there.[41]

IN THE SERVICE OF OTHERS

The Catholics mentioned above chose voluntary martyrdom largely out of their deep piety and a desire to witness to God or to publicly wipe away the shame and guilt of apostasy. At the same time, their membership in a community of Catholics played a role in their decisions, leading to the voluntary martyrdom of some who otherwise might not have sought out the honor,

driven by concern and devotion to their fellow Catholics, particularly family members. One of the earliest examples is that of Matthew Ch'oe In'gil (1764–95). A *chungin* translator, Matthew played an important role in helping Father James Zhou Wenmo, the first priest to enter Korea since the establishment of a Catholic community there in 1784. Matthew had been a Catholic for a long time and had taken part in the meetings hosted at Thomas Kim Pŏmu's (1751–87) house until they were broken up by the government. Though he was only admonished for his participation, Matthew must well have known the fate of Thomas, who died in government captivity owing to the beatings he received. He therefore would have understood the risk he was taking in 1795 when he dressed up as Father Zhou and used his Chinese-language skills to impersonate him, giving the priest time to escape. Matthew, along with two other Catholics who had helped protect Father Zhou were arrested and beaten to death in an effort to force them to confess the whereabouts of the priest.[42]

Father Zhou would continue to minister to his flock for several more years. When the persecution of 1801 broke out, the government sought to find him, and several Korean Catholics, including Columba Kang, suffered torture and death rather than reveal his whereabouts. In the end, Father Zhou surrendered himself to the authorities, declaring that his staying alive would not help his fellow Catholics. While the Chosŏn government's interpretation of Father Zhou's surrender as being the result of his belief that he could not successfully flee the country is likely too harsh, the fact that such escape would have been difficult, if not impossible, probably did play a role in convincing Father Zhou that God wanted him to surrender for the good of the community. Unfortunately, the result was far from his hopes that his surrender would lead to an end to the persecution; instead an immediate spike in arrests followed it.[43]

Father Zhou's clerical successors would behave similarly during the persecution of 1839. After his arrest, Bishop Laurent Imbert (1797–1839)—believing that the persecution was driven primarily by the government's desire to locate all of the French missionaries in the peninsula was leading to the deaths, and worse, the apostasy of many Korean Catholics—wrote letters to his two priests, Father Pierre Maubant (1803–39) and Father Jacques Chastan (1803–39), ordering them to surrender themselves. The two fathers obeyed, and they and their bishop were martyred. Thus, their sense of responsibility

to the Catholic community helped them choose death, as well as their identification as priests with Jesus, the "good shepherd."[44] It should also be noted that Theresa Kim, a Catholic who fasted three times a week, refused to abandon Bishop Imbert when police came to arrest him, though she had the opportunity to do so. She was arrested, subjected to six rounds of interrogation in which she was beaten a total of 280 times, and then martyred.[45] Widow Yi and Magdalene Cho had been so impressed by the bishop they decided that when an opportunity arose, they would surrender themselves so they too could be martyred. While they were arrested before they could give themselves up, their desire for martyrdom was granted.[46]

The loss of all the priests on the peninsula in 1839 was devastating to the Korean Catholic Church. Through their performance of the sacraments, priests acted as the regular channels through which grace and forgiveness flowed. Cognizance of this fact, as well as the realization that self-surrender did not really temper the persecutions, meant that the French priests were not as zealous to give themselves up in 1866 as they had been in 1839. This did not dim Korean loyalty to their shepherds. Luke Hwang Sŏktu (1811–66), had long worked with the priests, having been close to Father Maubant and having sought, unsuccessfully, to become a priest himself. He was with Bishop Daveluy when he was arrested and refused, despite being ordered to leave, to abandon the bishop. He too was arrested and martyred in 1866.[47] Joseph Chang Chugi (1803–66) was with a different group of priests. When they were arrested, he wanted to come with them, but they bribed the police and ordered him to leave. Disconsolate, he was arrested by a different group of police several days later. He would also be martyred at sixty-four years of age.[48]

The willingness to embrace voluntary martyrdom was thus often driven by relationships and by the desire to remain with the group, even unto death. Catholicism and family often went hand-in-hand in Chosŏn Korea, and while there were instances, especially in the early years of individual Catholics in largely non-Catholic families, eventually, with the establishment of Catholic villages, families that were entirely Catholic became the rule rather than the exception. It is therefore no surprise to find that family loyalties also led to cases of voluntary martyrdom. In 1801, Lucy Yun Unhye, a devout woman who helped support herself by making holy pictures of Jesus and Mary and stringing rosaries, had helped her husband escape while she stayed in their house

after learning of her sister's arrest. It is not clear from the records why Lucy did this, but perhaps it was to conceal her husband's flight as long as possible.[49] She was soon arrested and martyred. Kim Saengwŏn was sixty when he was arrested. His wife requested that she be arrested too. They were both martyred.[50] Maria Kim, a woman in her forties, did likewise when her husband was arrested.[51]

It is not clear from the extant records why these wives asked to be arrested with their husbands. Perhaps it was simply a desire to stay together borne from a love and devotion that had developed over decades of marriage. Maybe there was a desire to take care of their husband as much as possible—in her letters Luthgarde anguished over her virgin husband's suffering from a lack of clothing in prison.[52] Spiritual concern is clearly evident in the case of Peter Cho Suk (1787–1819) and his wife Theresa Kwŏn (1784–1819). Peter was a member of a yangban family that had converted to Catholicism and then fled their home during the persecution of 1801. His faith grew lukewarm, but his marriage to Theresa Kwŏn reignited it. Theresa was the daughter of Francis-Xavier Kwŏn Ilsin (?–1791), an important leader in the early Korean Catholic Church. Her mother died in 1790, her father in the aftermath of the 1791 persecution, and her brother in the 1801 persecution. She was then sent to live with relatives.

Theresa had a desire to live as a perpetual virgin, but her relatives urged her to marry as remaining single in a society in which marriage was the norm would attract dangerous attention. She relented and was married to Peter. On their wedding night, she presented to Peter a letter explaining her desire to remain a virgin and invited him to do the same. He accepted her arguments, but it seems that he had a tendency to waver, and she had to encourage him to maintain their promise several times during their marriage. When the police came to arrest him in 1817, Theresa volunteered to come as well. They were imprisoned together, and several times when he seemed to be wavering, she encouraged him to keep his faith by reminding him that those who abandoned God could not escape punishment in the afterlife. Both died as martyrs.[53]

Wives did not have the monopoly on self-sacrifice through voluntary martyrdom. Lawrence Pak Ch'widŭk was an early convert to Catholicism. He openly criticized the government for punishing people for being Catholic in 1791 and was himself arrested, though he was later released. Though he con-

tinued to practice his faith, bad memories of his brush with the law likely played a role in his decision to flee in 1797 when a minor anti-Catholic persecution broke out. His father was consequently arrested and Lawrence gave himself up and was eventually martyred in 1799.[54] Though it is not clear why, when John Yi Chŏngsik, who was not a voluntary martyr, was arrested in 1866 his son, Francis Yi Kwanbok, and his nephew, Peter Yi Sanggŭm both surrendered themselves to the government.[55] Similarly, when Mark Yu was arrested, his uncle and brother-in-law both voluntarily gave themselves up as well.[56] Families were often kept together, and perhaps these men hoped they could serve their fathers and uncles in prison. A son of Augustine Chŏng Yakchong, Charles Chŏng Ch'ŏlsang (?–1801) while not surrendering himself voluntarily, visited his father in prison often to help see to his needs. He must have known that what he was doing was dangerous, as large numbers of Catholics were being arrested and executed during the 1801 persecution, but he continued in his filial duties. The day his father was executed Charles was arrested and then martyred.[57]

Such self-surrender among family members was not simply a Confucian deference flowing from low to high. Brigid Ch'oe's (1783–1839) husband died in exile. With no means of support, she went to live with her older brother, the father of John Ch'oe Haesŏng. When her nephew John was arrested, she went to the prison and claiming to be his mother demanded to see him. The guards retorted that she must also be a Catholic, and she responded that she was, leading to her arrest and consequent martyrdom.[58] Gervase Son Kyŏngyun, appointed a catechist by father Zhou, surrendered when his wife and children were arrested after he fled.[59] Florus Hyŏn Kyehŭm (1763–1801) did the same when his flight from the law led to the suffering of his family.[60]

There are several particularly interesting cases of fathers surrendering themselves for their children. Peter Yi Sŏngsam gave himself up for his youngest son.[61] Sixty-year-old Paul Yi also surrendered himself for his child.[62] John Pak likewise surrendered for the sake of his son Peter.[63] Forty-year-old Matthew Kim surrendered himself when his son was arrested and was then executed with his own father.[64] Unfortunately, the lack of information precludes us from understanding exactly what happened in these cases, but it would seem that the fathers had fled and their children had been arrested in order to force them to surrender themselves. It is implied that the sons were released, which is very curious indeed, as at least some of these children were

probably Catholics, as seen by their having Catholic names. Perhaps the government saw the fathers as their true target and did not believe much harm could come from the children (it's not clear from the records how old they were). In any case, in a culture where children should sacrifice for fathers, the willingness of these fathers to accept torture and death on behalf of their children is striking. While such an action might have been taken to insure descendants, the Catholic rejection of ancestor rites makes this motivation appear rather unlikely. Instead, it seems that a genuinely fatherly love led such Catholics to embrace voluntary martyrdom.

PASSIVE VOLUNTARY MARTYRS

As we have seen, while some Korean Catholics actively volunteered to give themselves up, others simply refused to flee despite having the opportunity to do so or even after being ordered to by a bishop or priest. I believe it is therefore necessary to discuss a category I refer to as the "passive voluntary martyr" to describe people who, while refusing to flee, also avoided surrendering themselves to the government. Why might Catholics take this middle path? As we have seen in the above examples, some did so out of a loyalty and devotion to fellow Catholics who were themselves about to be, or in the process of being, arrested. Sometimes the reasons were also theological. Paul Chŏng T'aebong (1796–1839) was the cousin of a martyr and desired to be one as well. However, he believed that it was his duty to flee, as giving himself up would be acting "imprudently." The police found him anyway, and he went with them without complaint, not even attempting to argue, since his name was not spelled correctly on the warrant, that he was not the man they were looking for.[65] Arrested in 1827, he had to wait twelve years before being executed in 1839.[66] Andrew Kim Sagŏn (1794–1839) felt likewise, and therefore, despite having apostatized with his father in 1815, decided he had better wait for providence rather than give himself up. Like Paul, he too was arrested in 1827 but was not executed until 1839. He is remembered as maintaining his faith and being happy in prison, perhaps a sign of relief that he could wipe away the shame and guilt of his apostasy before he had to face God and be judged.[67] Thomas Chang (1815–66) likewise refused to give himself up rather than being arrested, choosing instead to wait for God's will.[68]

The decision to wait for God's will was perhaps shaped by the desire to be a martyr conflicting with this-worldly duties, especially for those who had apostatized in the past. This was the case for Peter Yi T'aegwŏn (1782–1839). One of his uncles and his own father had died as martyrs, though he himself appears to have apostatized on two separate occasions. He therefore seems to have wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to die as a martyr. However, unable to leave his family for unspecified reasons, he chose to wait for God's will, while at the same time helping his younger siblings to escape. He would eventually be martyred.[69] To Catholics there was no contradiction here—God might will something for one person but then will quite another thing for someone else. Sometimes Catholics had difficulty discerning God's will. Marcellinus Ch'oe Changju (1749–1801) had apostatized in 1791 and was released. He retained his faith and wanted to be a martyr. However, when the 1801 persecution broke out, his wife and mother encouraged him to flee. He initially did, then remembered his desire to be a martyr and returned home, where he was arrested shortly thereafter. He died a martyr.[70]

Those who had a desire to be martyred but were held back for practical or theological reasons, or a mixture of both, could still show their desire for martyrdom by how they reacted to their arrests. Peter Kim Taegwŏn (1782–1839), a potter by trade, was a devout man who ceased his practice of praying all night on mountains only when faced with the danger of tiger attacks. When he learned that his younger brother Jacob Kim Hwach'un had been executed in the persecution of 1816, he developed a deep desire to die a martyr. When the persecution of 1827 broke out, he refused to flee but also did not surrender himself, choosing to wait for God's will. Thus, when police came to arrest him, he met them with a smile and went with them willingly.[71] Like Andrew Kim and Paul Chŏng, he had to wait twelve years for his martyrdom. Francis Kim Hŭisong (1765–1816) also desired to be a martyr after the execution of a family member, in his case his father. Like Peter Kim, he led a life dedicated to prayer and self-denial. When the 1815 persecution broke out, police, led by an informant, came to the foot of the mountain on which he lived and called for him to come down. Offering his mother words of consolation, he asked his wife to take care of the family and teach the children well, and then told his son not to come with him but to follow God's will. Francis then walked down the mountain and greeted the police warmly with a smile.

He died a martyr in 1816. Similarly, Kim Ch'igong wanted to be a martyr, and when police found him, he met them joyfully.[72] Likewise, Job Yi Irŏn (1767–1839), so frustrated that "he could die" by his failure to be martyred after his arrest in 1801, lamented when the persecution of 1827 broke out that he lived in such an out-of-the-way place no one would come find and arrest him. When police did come to arrest him, he happily gave himself up.[73]

Women could be passive voluntary martyrs as well, as seen in the cases of Theresa Kim (1811–39) and Elizabeth Chŏng Chŏnghye (1797–1839). Theresa Kim, the aunt of the first Korean priest, Father Andrew Kim Taegŏn, initially wanted to be a perpetual virgin. However, her Catholic father insisted that she marry, and she obeyed, marrying another Catholic. Elizabeth Chŏng Chŏnghye—the elder sister of Paul Chŏng Hasang, an important leader in the Catholic Church who wrote a petition to the government calling for the tolerance of Catholicism based on its compatibility with Confucianism was also executed in 1839—was so shy that she even tried to prevent relatives from seeing her face. Like other Catholic women we have thus far encountered, she became a perpetual virgin. Unlike these other women, it is reported that around the age of thirty, she began to have second thoughts, as she apparently began to feel strong sexual urges. In response, Elizabeth whipped herself in an ultimately successful effort to drive out such desires. Theresa was visiting with Elizabeth when the 1839 persecution broke out. Though the two had the opportunity to escape, they both expressed a desire to die and passively waited for their arrest. They thus joined the ranks of the martyrs of that year.[74]

It is not clear from the records how Elizabeth and Theresa met the men who had come to arrest them. Barbara Sim Agi—another perpetual virgin who, owing to the arrest of her brother, knew that she would likely be arrested, chose to wait to be captured—gives us some insight into how the arrest might have happened. When police did come to arrest Barbara, she told her mother not to be too sad and asked that she be allowed to follow God's "holy will." She then went to face her captors and proclaimed that she was indeed a Catholic.[75] Not all women who were passive voluntary martyrs were perpetual virgins. Perpetua Hong Kŭmok, a devout widow described as having a "manly" personality (*namja ŭi kisang*), was encouraged by various people to escape but refused to do so. Not only was she physically tortured before being martyred, she was stripped naked, hung upside down, and sexually assaulted.

She was thirty-six. The suffering, insult, and death she endured illustrates the cost of voluntary martyrdom, and the deep fear that had to be overcome to embrace it.[76]

CONCLUSION

Voluntary martyrs were old, young, and middle aged; they were married, widows or widowers, perpetual virgins, and members of the clergy. Some bravely and brazenly proclaimed their Catholicism and demanded that they be martyred. Others were more passive and hesitant. Saintly figures with a powerful, militant faith, as well as those who had stumbled and apostatized might surrender themselves to the authorities. There is no discernible demographic category or personality type that differentiates voluntary martyrs from those who did not surrender or allow themselves to be arrested. Instead, what united them was a theological belief that martyrdom was a great good that Catholics should hope to obtain. While happy enough to keep living during normal times, when persecution struck, and their fellow Catholics were being killed for confessing the faith, other Catholics were forced to discern how they should react. During such times, Catholics faced a continuum of choice, from actively surrendering themselves, to passively waiting for arrest and meeting it joyfully when it came, to doing all they could short of denying their faith to save their lives. Most martyrs chose the last option, but as we have seen, a significant minority chose otherwise.

In examining the circumstances that led Catholics to become voluntary martyrs, it must be stressed that we are not simply dealing with isolated individuals but a community bound together by a belief in a God whose son had died for them. As such, martyrdom for God blended in many cases with self-surrender not only to witness to one's faith in Him but also for the community as well. A wife might give herself up to follow her husband, a widow to follow a bishop, and a father to free his child. For many voluntary martyrs, the loss of parents or other family members pulled them toward this embrace of death and the heavenly reunion they believed would follow it, particularly when a family member was a martyr.[77] Voluntary martyrdom out of devotion to God, and often by extension the Catholic community and one's family, touched within Catholics deep cords of emotion and feeling, inherited from both Chosŏn morality and Catholicism, lending a

sense of dignity and purpose to such suffering. Thus, voluntary martyrdom, whether active or passive, seemed not only natural and rational to at least some Catholics but also compelling, as the will of the God, the great parent, to whom they owed everything.

NOTES

1. The records are not entirely clear, but it would seem that Ambrose's companions were not sentenced to death, as he was.

2. Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyo chugyohoe ŭi sibok sisŏng chugyo t'ŭkp'yŏl wiwŏnhoe, *"Hanŭnim ŭi chong" Yun Chi-ch'ung Paoro wa tongnyo sun'gyoja 123 wi* ["Servants of God" Paul Yun Chich'ung and 123 other martyrs], 246–47.

3. This record comes from the *Kihae ilgi* [Journal of 1839], a text compiled by Hyŏn Sŏngmun, who lived through the persecution of 1839. Page numbers refer to the modern Korean translation. See Hyŏn Sŏngmun, *Kihae ilgi* [Journal of 1839], 146–48.

4. Catholics in government custody typically faced the choice between giving up their faith and exile or maintaining their faith and death. Thus, a Catholic who surrendered to the government and still believed in Catholicism was essentially choosing torture (used, from the perspective of the government, to help Catholics realize the error of their ways) and death.

5. Matthew 16:24. *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*, Second Catholic Edition.

6. Anthony E. Clark, *China's Saints*, 7–23.

7. I examine these issues in detail in the book chapter "Dying for Heaven," 213–36. In particular, the prison journal of the martyr Paul Yi Kyŏngŏn, examined in "Dying for Heaven," is illustrative of this phenomenon. See also a modern Korean translation of his prison journal in Kim Chinso, ed., *Yi Suni Rugalta nammae okchung p'yŏnji* [The prison letters of Yi Suni Luthgarde and her brothers], 69–84.

8. Hyŏn Sŏngmun, *Kihae ilgi*, 42–46.

9. For an analysis of Catholic understandings of moral frailty, see Donald Baker, "Danger Within."

10. For the missionary cult of martyrdom see Jacob Ramsay, *Missionaries and Mandarins*, 100–101; Florence Gillmore, *For the Faith*; and J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided*, 51–55.

11. Jungwon Kim, chapter 1 (this volume), "Yŏl (烈): Chaste Martyrdom and Literati Writing in Late Chosŏn Korea."

12. See Franklin Rausch, "Dying for Heaven," 218–19.

13. Chŏng Yakchong, *Chugyo Yoji* [Essentials of Catholicism].

14. Hyŏn Sŏngmun, *Kihae ilgi*, 123–25.

15. For an English translation of the classical Chinese document, titled *Paeksŏ* (The silk letter), written by Alexius Hwang that contains this information see Don Baker, with Franklin Rausch, *Catholics and Anti-Catholicism in Chosŏn Korea*, 178. The original Chinese of the letter, as well as a modern Korean translation, can be found in Hwang Sayŏng, *Nuga chŏhŭi rŭl wirohae chugessŭmnikka* [Who will console us].

16. Donald Baker, *Korean Spirituality*, 64–70.

17. For an example, see Chŏng Yakchong, *Chugyo Yoji*, 55–56.

18. See Matthew 10:23.

19. French Catholic priest Charles Dallet, while praising Luthgarde Yi Suni, explained that voluntary martyrdom was prohibited by church law. See Charles Dallet, *Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyohoesa* [History of the Korean Catholic Church] 1: 540.

20. Candida R. Moss, "The Discourse of Voluntary Martyrdom: Ancient and Modern," 532.

21. Don Baker and Franklin Rausch, *Catholics and Anti-Catholicism*, 180–82.

22. Ibid., 180.

23. Ibid., 182.

24 This martyrdom is described in the *Ch'imyŏng ilgi* [Journal of those who met their fate], a collection of information about martyrs gathered from Catholics in the early 1890s and first published in 1895. Martyrs are listed by number. See the reprint by Mwit'ael [Gustave Mutel], *Ch'imyŏng ilgi* [Journal of those who met their fate], no. 788.

25. Ibid., no. 540.

26. Ibid., no. 206.

27. Ibid., no. 749.

28. Hyŏn Sŏngmun, *Kihae ilgi*, 64–67 and 70–73.

29. Ibid., 62.

30. Ibid., 62.

31. For instance, perpetual virginity was praised by the Jesuit missionary to China, Father Didace de Pantoja, in his *Seven Victories*. For Korean translations of this work, see Kim Chinso, Kim Hyŏnung, and Pak Wansik, trans., *Ch'ilgŭk ilgop kaji sŭngni ŭi kil* [Seven victories: Seven roads to victory], 225–64; and Pak Yuri, trans., *Ch'ilgŭk: Kŭrisŭdogyo wa sinyugyo ŭi ch'ogi chŏpch'ok esŏ hyŏngsŏng toen suyangnon* [Seven victories: The development of moral cultivation during the early contact between Christianity and neo-Confucianism], 323–78.

32. Hyŏn Sŏngmun, *Kihae ilgi*, 59–63

33. Charles Dallet, *Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyohoesa* 1: 534–35.

34. Kim Chinso, *Ch'ŏnjugyo Chŏnju kyogusa* 1: 204–6.

35. Don Baker and Franklin Rausch, *Catholics and Anti-Catholicism*, 182–83.

36. Hyŏn Sŏngmun, *Kihae ilgi*, 59–63.

37. Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyo Chugyohoe, ed., *Hanŭnim ŭi chong*, 206–8.

38. Charles Dallet, *Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyohoesa* 1 :453.

39. See Donald Baker and Franklin Rausch, *Catholics and Anti-Catholicism*, 183–84.

40. Hyŏn Sŏngmun, *Kihae ilgi*, 146–48.

41. Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyo Chugyohoe, ed., *"Hanŭnim ŭi chong,"* 203–4

42. Ibid., 50–52.

43. Franklin Rausch, "Dying for Heaven," 221–22.

44. Charles Dallet, *Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyohoesa* 2: 448–63; and John 10:11.

45. Charles Dallet, *Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyohoesa* 2: 524.

46. See Hyŏn Sŏngmun, *Kihae ilgi*, 154–58; and Charles Dallet, *Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyohoesa* 2: 471–73.

47. Charles Dallet, *Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyohoesa*, 3: 428–31 and 434–35.

48. Ibid., 3: 432–33.

49. Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyo Chugyohoe, ed., *"Hanŭnim ŭi chong,"* 105–6.

50. Mwit'ael [Gustave Mutel], *Ch'imyŏng ilgi*, no. 204.

51. Ibid., no. 213 and no. 214.

52. Kim Chinso ed, *Yi Suni Rugalta nammae okchung p'yŏnji*, 49.

53. Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyo Chugyohoe, ed., *"Hanŭnim ŭi chong,"* 234–359.

54. Ibid., 61–63.

55. Ibid., 321–22.

56. Mwit'ael, *Ch'imyŏng ilgi*, no. 660.

57. Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyo Chugyohoe, ed., *"Hanŭnim ŭi chong,"* 111–12.

58. Ibid., 282–83.

59. Ibid., 174–75.

60. Ibid., 170–71.

61. Mwit'ael, *Ch'imyŏng ilgi*, no. 472.

62. Ibid., no. 477.

63. Ibid., no. 542.

64. Ibid., 740.

65. While he did flee, I believe that the fact that he did not protest about the warrant allows me to categorize him as a passive voluntary martyr rather than as a non-voluntary martyr.

66. Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyo Chugyohoe, ed., *"Hanŭnim ŭi chong,"* 267–68.

67. Ibid., 256–58.

68. Ibid., 304–5.

69. Ibid., 265–66

70. Ibid., 92–93.

71. Ibid., 269–70.

72. Mwit'ael, *Ch'imyŏng ilgi*, no. 274.

73. Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyo Chugyohoe, ed., *"Hanŭnim ŭi chong,"* 259–60.

74. Hyŏn Sŏngmun, *Kihae ilgi*, 169–70
75. Han'guk Ch'ŏnjugyo Chugyohoe, ed., "*Hanŭnim ŭi chong*," 113–14
76. Hyŏn Sŏngum, *Kihae ilgi*, 100–102.
77. See Franklin Rausch, "Dying for Heaven," 223–27.

PART II

Colonial-Postcolonial Transition in South Korea

5

A False Martyr's Wager: Yi Kwangsu and Colonial Collaboration

SERK-BAE SUH

A FAILING FATHER

The literary critic Kim Hyŏn once wrote that Yi Kwangsu is like a wound that gets worse if you keep touching it.[1] He argued that Yi had left an indelible scar on the Korean mind. Having been one of the most influential writers as well as intellectuals in the history of modern Korea, Yi ended up capitulating to unjustifiable foreign rule. The problem for Kim was he could not avoid probing Yi—the wound—no matter how painful it became not only because Yi had made an undeniably decisive contribution to the development of modern Korean literature but also because the case of Yi's collaboration with colonial rule posed a crucial question to Yi's critics, including Kim himself, that is, whether they, unlike Yi, could have courageously resisted the demands of an unjust world or not, and thus challenged them to be self-reflective on the issue of an individual's responsibility to history.

Although appearing deceptively self-evident and quoted repeatedly as such by many others in evaluating Yi's life and literature, Kim's statement begs further questions. How could Yi be both a wound and, paradoxically, the one who inflicted it? If he was both the scar left on the Korean psyche, and the one who caused it, as Kim suggests, is the Korean mind the only one that bears the mark of the colonial legacies Yi symbolizes? How about modern Korean literature, the initial development of which, in Kim's view, was singularly indebted to Yi's novel *Mujŏng* (Heartless, 1917)?[2] No matter what the answers would be, one thing for sure is that Kim acknowledged Yi's indisputable contribution to the emergence of modern Korean literature and, at the same time, pointed out the inescapable relevance of his collaboration with Japanese colonial rule to any serious evaluation of his literature and life.[3]

Furthermore, the fact that Kim's statement has been frequently quoted suggests that many others agree with his assessment.[4]

If we cannot do away with the history of modern Korean literature, an unavoidably genealogical configuration, and as long as we assume that there is such an entity as modern Korean literature—although one might grimace at its essentially patrilineal nature—we will have to acknowledge that its patriarchal lineage began with Yi Kwangsu (1892–1950).[5] If we have to trace the origin of modern Korean literature and attribute its primordial moment to only one literary work, we cannot help but look at Yi's novel *Heartless*. Being the progenitor of modern vernacular Korean-language literature, Yi was also one of its most prolific disseminators whose oeuvre includes diverse genres ranging from poetry to plays. He was not only prolific but also popular. To be more exact, he was prolific because he was a bestselling writer sought after by publishing houses. Risking exaggeration, one might say he fathered modern Korean literature.

If Yi was both a wound to the Korean psyche and the inflictor of it, as Kim argues, we can also justifiably say that Yi is an old wound that pains Koreans whenever they attempt to reopen it as well as the one who made a deep cut through which modern Korean literature was born. In other words, the pain caused by Yi, which still lingers these days in South Korean society, is the result of the birth of modern Korean literature.[6]

Although having passed away more than six and a half decades ago, the patriarch of modern Korean literature is still at the center of controversy which divides not only literary scholars and critics but also South Korean society in general. To some, he was a tragic figure whose miscalculated collaboration with the Japanese authorities during the last decade of colonial rule was blown out of proportion, and a man who was unfairly vilified for it. To others, he was an indisputably despicable traitor who not only fawned on the colonizers but also desired to become one of them. Even those who see both the good and the harm he did to Korean culture and society during the Colonial Period feel growingly uneasy about their non-partisan view due to the persistent schism between his defenders and critics. There are still others who make his collaboration an example of the perniciousness of nationalism. Taking his defense of himself at face value, they argue that there was a logical continuity between his earlier nationalist and later pro-Japanese discourse, and that he became a collaborator not because he gave up his nationalist

ideas but because he remained faithful to his nationalism through the end of colonial rule, believing Korean collaboration would persuade the Japanese to treat the colonized equally as subjects of the Japanese Empire. From this perspective, his collaboration with the colonial government was not the traitorous transgression but rather the inevitable consequence of his nationalist thoughts.[7] No matter which stance one may take up, no one can afford to close their eyes to Yi's colonial collaboration in evaluating his influence over modern Korean literature and history.

Modern Korean literature thus has a failing father, a less than honorable one, because Yi's image was irrevocably tarnished by his colonial collaboration. Whenever the issue of colonial collaboration comes up, his name tops the list of traitors not only because Yi Kwangsu was one of the most prominent public intellectuals in colonial Korea but also because only a few outdid him in embracing Japanese assimilation policy. His language and rhetoric in expressing his zeal for Japanese assimilation policies and his loyalty to the Japanese emperor were almost perverse due to its extreme fervor. That said, his words were so embarrassing and outrageous that it may lead one to question his sincerity.[8]

Kim Yunsik, a prominent scholar of modern Korean literature, memorably summed up Yi's life and literary career as a course of struggles to overcome his "orphan complex."[9] Kim suggested that even before Yi lost his parents at the age of eleven, he had already become an orphan in a way because he was ashamed of them. Being an uneducated third wife of a much older man, his mother was someone he felt deserved his sympathy rather than filial respect. His father, hailing from a family of declining fortune, did not fare well either in Yi's eyes. He was a man of bumbling incompetence and embarrassing vanity. According to Kim, the shame Yi felt about his parents pushed him to constantly look for a respectable father figure in his mentors throughout his life.[10]

It can be said that Yi also desired to be a good father figure to his readers and the Korean youth. As noted by Kim Yunsik, the excessive didacticism of Yi's literary works indicates that Yi desired to be a respectable teacher to his readers. He felt compelled to teach them what they needed to know to become participants of a modern nation.[11] What is at issue here for us is that as his mentors represented substitute fathers to him, the teacher figure he desired to be overlapped with the image of a benevolent father who took great pains

to guide his children through to maturity. As exemplarily shown in the interactions between Yi Hyŏngsik, the protagonist of his first novel *Heartless*, and his students, for Yi Kwangsu, the ideal teacher was a more fatherly figure than a scholarly one.[12] If that was the case, his desire to be a respectable father figure to the following generations was barely fulfilled. He is regarded as a father, if not *the* father, of modern Korean literature, but it is questionable whether he commanded the absolute filial respect of his literary descendants. To many of them, he ended up being like his own father, a failing father whom his son felt ashamed of.

Conversely, quite a few people both in and outside of academia are sympathetic toward his collaboration and more than willing to believe his justification that he collaborated not for his own fame, wealth, or safety but for his nation. They cannot accept the idea that their national literature was fathered by a traitor of the nation. Few filial children dare to admit their father was a crook for him but also for themselves.

A MARTYR'S CONFESSION

Three years after the end of Japanese colonial rule, Yi wrote a book titled *Na ŭi kobaek* (My confession, 1948).[13] As he made clear in the preface, its main aim was to defend his collaborationist activities during the Colonial Period. Yi asserted that despite pleas from his friends and supporters that he should provide the public with an explanation for his colonial collaboration and sincerely apologize for it, he had wished neither to defend his collaboration in public nor to apologize for it. He did not want to look like he was making excuses because he still believed that he had collaborated only to help Koreans. However, he went on to contend that he decided to break his silence and come forward with an explanation because he was afraid that the people's misunderstanding of his collaboration would not dissipate as long as he kept silent.[14] Interestingly, he portrayed himself as a martyr, who suffered on behalf of the Korean nation by willingly sacrificing his moral and political reputation and integrity.

As a matter of fact, the rhetoric of sacrifice for the nation was very effective for defending colonial collaborators because it enabled the accused to defend themselves without disagreeing with their accusers on the premise that the collaboration of the colonized with the colonizer is a traitorous sin. The logic

goes as follows. They could not help collaborating with Japanese rule even though they were aware it was a sin because they had believed that their collaboration would benefit the Korean nation. In other words, their love for their nation made them commit the heinous sin of collaboration. The more appalling the sin turns out to be, the more it proves their love for their nation.

Another noteworthy fact about *Na ŭi kobaek* is that it was written in the form of an autobiography. Conventionally, an autobiography is understood to be one's account of his or her own life. It is presumed that an autobiography tells the truth of its subject's life. As pointed out by quite a few literary scholars however, there are elusive boundaries between autobiography and fiction.[15] Paul de Man takes the issue further and links it to the absence of referential substance outside text. According to him, although the narrator and subject of an autobiographical narrative are conventionally considered to coincide with an actual person external to text, there is no assured unity between them as long as an autobiography cannot be delivered but through language. He thus denies the referentiality of the autobiographical subject beyond text. For him, the "I" of an autobiography is discursively constructed and does not necessarily refer to the historical "I" outside the text.[16]

Even if one is skeptical about de Man's radical dissociation of the autobiographical subject from the historical person whom the subject is conventionally believed to refer to, one cannot help admitting that any autobiographical account, to a certain degree, belies its truth claim if the truth means the complete correspondence between the text and the world external to it.[17] The problem of fact and fiction, which haunts any autobiographical account, cannot be exhaustively attributed to its author's intentional fabrication of their life, however, because the autobiographer is not necessarily conscious of this desire that dictates their writing. An autobiography is a literary convention in which two seemingly oppositional desires, one for revealing oneself and the other for hiding oneself, are woven into a narrative. Strictly speaking, the two desires are not oppositional. They are rather two sides of the same desire, which makes the autobiographer bear witness to his or her life. By revealing certain elements of its subject's life in certain ways, autobiographies hide other elements of subjects' lives. In other words, it narrates one's life in a certain way, which is only one of many possible ways. The ultimate way that the autobiographer chooses to narrate their life is conventionally regarded as the result of their authentic self's reflection on their life even though it might

be the outcome of the author's unconscious desire that motivates their writing. Thus, what fundamentally makes an autobiography distinct from a biography is the premise that an autobiography is supposed to externalize the author's inside while a biography is unable to do so. That means an autobiography is premised on the assumption that it conveys what is known only to oneself, that is, his or her secrecy. Consequently, autobiographical truth cannot be completely disproved in comparison with objective facts alone. How can somebody else disprove the way in which the author sees themselves and their life if the author insists that it is their truth? [18]

The fact that autobiographical truth is different than historical truth poses an almost insurmountable difficulty to those who rebut Yi's autobiography in which he insisted he had collaborated for his nation. If that was how he felt about his active support for Japanese colonial rule, one can hardly disprove it.[19] One can argue that in actuality, his act of collaboration did not do any good to Koreans, but that argument alone cannot prove that Yi fabricated an excuse to save himself from prosecution because no one other than Yi himself knew his true intention of collaboration.[20]

Therefore rather than dismissing out of hand Yi's insistence that his collaboration was an act of sacrifice, we need to take it seriously and examine carefully what the nature of his sacrifice was.[21] By taking seriously his excuses for collaboration, I do not intend to suggest that his collaboration was indeed a genuine manifestation of his idea of sacrifice, which never ceased to fascinate him. Neither do I sympathize with his collaboration as an unfortunate miscalculation nevertheless derived from his sincere love for his nation. Instead, by carefully examining the ways in which the ideas of self-sacrifice and martyrdom are deployed to defend his collaborationist activities in his autobiography, *Naŭi kobaek*, I rather take this opportunity to think about the problem of sacrifice in his defense of collaboration.

A GAMBLER'S SACRIFICE, A MARTYR'S WAGER

Yi's invocation of self-sacrifice is often dismissed as either a shameless excuse or a feeble justification for his sinful collaboration with colonial domination, yet his idea of martyrdom was significantly featured in his earlier literary work.[22] He wrote several literary texts about martyrdom well before his enthusiastic collaboration and outrageous justification of it as self-sacrifice. They

include *Sun'gyoja* (Martyr, 1920), a play about nineteenth-century Korean Catholic martyrs under Regent Hŭngsŏn's rule, *Kŭmsipchaga* (Golden cross, 1924), an unfinished novel about the same subject, and *Yi Ch'adon ŭi sa* (The death of Yi Ch'adon, 1935), a novel about the sixth-century martyrdom of a Buddhist court official in the Kingdom of Silla (1935–36). Yi's short story "Kŏrukhan i ŭi chugŭm" (The death of the sacred one) can also be included in this category. The story, published in the 1923 March issue of the journal *Kaebyŏk* (The dawn of a new world), centers around the martyrdom of Suun Ch'oe Cheu, the founder of Tonghak.

The recurring theme of martyrdom in Yi's work has not escaped Korean literary scholars' notice. Kim Yunsik, for example, looks at "The Death of the Sacred One" as the culmination of Yi's literary interest in martyrdom. Kim argues that despite the parallels between Ch'oe Cheu's execution portrayed in "The Death of the Sacred One" and Christ's crucifixion presented in the books of the New Testament, Yi's story is about despair unlike the narrative of Christ's death, which was ultimately overcome by his resurrection. According to Kim, before committing himself to Suyang Tonguhoe (Society of Friends for Self-Improvement)—a sister organization of An Ch'angho's Hŭngsadan (Young Korean Academy), as a new outlet for his nationalism—Yi needed to literarily stage the death of the founder of Tonghak, which he had once been involved in, and which he saw had lost its nationalist dimension by the time when he wrote the story. In other words, Kim implies that Yi needed to symbolically confirm the death of his spiritual father, Ch'oe Cheu, in order to adopt a new spiritual father, An Ch'angho.[23] What Kim's observation implicitly calls attention to is the inseparable connection between Yi's literary interest in martyrdom and sacrifice, his spiritual yearning, and his politics.

Yi's introduction to *Yi Ch'adon ŭi sa* [The death of Yi Ch'adon] offers another glimpse into his obsession with martyrdom and sacrifice. He wrote,

> I admire martyrs probably because I am not good enough to become one. It is martyrs that I worship. The spirit of martyrdom is the willingness to give up one's life for "truth" and "belief." It is the willingness to die for saving mankind [chungsaeng]. Neither does the martyr cherish his own wealth and fame nor does he care about death or life, suffering or pleasure. What he cares

> about is truth and mankind. The spirit of martyrdom rests in the place where one completely forgets about oneself. It is, in other words, one's completion.[24]

More than a decade later when defending himself in the face of increasing criticism of his collaborationist activities, Yi specified his idea of sacrifice as an act of political devotion. In the preface of *My Confession*, he wrote;

> Why did I end up being accused of collaboration and bringing disgrace on myself? It might sound ludicrous, but I had my reasons. This book aims to explain them. Put simply, my intention was to sacrifice myself in order to save as many of my people from persecution as I could. When I was young, I was ambitious. I thought I could save my entire nation. When returning from Shanghai at the age of thirty, I dreamed of becoming like Gandhi of India at the very least. I came to realize I was unworthy of my dream, however. I changed my mind and decided to realize my ambitious dream in the field of literature and hoped to help my nation in small ways. Buddhism teaches that it would be fortunate if you could save one life, and I have found it more convincing than my ambitious dream of saving a nation. I did not collaborate with the Japanese for myself. I did not do it for a high official position, financial benefits, or my safety. Unwisely believing I was doing it for my nation, I collaborated.[25]

One noticeable difference between his earlier essay about his admiration of martyrs and his later justification of colonial collaboration concerns the question, whom is sacrifice made for? Those whom sacrifice is made for are narrowed down from "mankind" to "my people" in his later writing. Given that Yi's obsession with martyrdom and sacrifice always had as much to do with his nationalism as it did with his religious spirituality, which was shaped by both Tolstoyan humanistic Christianity and Buddhism, the difference might not be as significant as it initially looks. A more important difference rather lies in his judgment about whether he can bear the burden of self-sacrifice. In his earlier writing, he humbly confesses that he cannot measure up to martyrdom and this was exactly why he admires martyrs. In contrast, he insists in his later work that he sacrificed himself for the nation. Yi's two contradictory self-judgments can be reconciled as follows. He was not capable of sacrificing himself for mankind or even for his nation in admirable

ways as Gandhi was, but, at least in his view, he did what he could for the nation, i.e., collaboration with the Japanese colonial authorities although he was very well aware he would be ridiculed, taunted, and despised by many Koreans.

Yi devotes many pages of *Na ŭi kobaek* to recounting his nationalist activities including his involvement in Tonghak, his career as a young teacher educating youth at Osan School, and his participation in the establishment of the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai. His treatment of collaboration comes up only in the last part of the book. He defended his collaboration as an inevitable course of events beginning from his imprisonment due to his involvement in Suyang Tonguhoe. He was arrested along with other members of the organization in 1937 and tried on the charge of disturbing public order. He felt he needed to be cooperative with the Japanese government in order to save from indictment not only himself but also his fellow members of Suyang Tonguhoe. They were the leaders of the Korean nation. If they were indicted and incarcerated, Korea would be left alone without its leaders. He had to do whatever he could take to get them acquitted and chose to sacrifice himself for them. So, when he was told to participate in pro-Japanese cultural activities, he passively agreed.[26] He suggests he was still reluctant to do so, and that he only pretended to be cooperative.

A seismic event occurred which forced him to change his attitude toward collaboration. According to Yi, it was the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941 that decisively pushed him into active collaboration.[27] He once again insisted that his active collaboration was not an act of cowardice or in pursuit of self-interest. Upon hearing about Japan's declaration of war against the United States and Britain, he immediately realized that Japan would do everything it could to ensure Korea's cooperation for its war effort. What should Koreans do in the face of the colonizer's exponentially growing demand for cooperation? He reasoned that the Japanese government would mobilize Koreans whether they consented or not. He went on to highlight a rumor circulating among Koreans at that time that the Japanese authorities had made a list of thirty to forty thousand Korean leaders and would round them up anytime and even execute them if deemed necessary. What if Koreans did not cooperate with the Japanese for their war effort? The Korean leaders would certainly be persecuted and even put to death. If that was the case, he continued, why should Koreans resist Japan's demand for cooperation and get the entirety of

their social elites on the Japanese government's blacklist "sacrificed?"[28] Why should Korea not make the most out of this opportunity instead? If Yi cooperated with the Japanese authorities, they would become lenient with other Korean nationalists in return who would otherwise face increasing persecution as Japan's war with the United States and its allies intensified. Furthermore, he calculated that there was little Koreans would lose if they placed their bet on their colonial master. If Japan won the war, Korea would be granted equality and freedom as a reward for its contributions to Japan's victory. Even if Japan lost, Korea's cooperation would not go unrewarded completely because the administrative, technological, and military skills the Korean bureaucrats, technicians, and soldiers gained from serving for Japan could be of value and used in the construction of an independent Korea.

Yi's reasoning is reminiscent of what is known as Pascal's wager. In *Pensées* (Thoughts), Blaise Pascal presented his famous argument for the existence of God by drawing on an example of gambling. Risking an oversimplification of the argument, which can be viewed as a convergence of Christian apologetics, probability theory, and decision-making strategy, it can be outlined as follows. If you are forced to wager your life on whether God exists or not, you'd better choose faith over disbelief in His existence because it is a safer bet. If God exists, you will be rewarded for your faith with "an infinitely happy infinity of life."[29] Even if he does not exist, you will lose only one finite life. On the other hand, placing your wager on the non-existence of God may lead to a much direr consequence. You will neither lose nor win anything if God does not exist. You will keep your life, which is already yours. What if God exists, however? You will be infinitely damned for your disbelief. In a similar fashion, Yi argued collaboration was the best bet for the Korean nation under Japanese rule because Koreans would lose little regardless of the outcome of the war. To be more exact, placing a wager on collaboration would even be safer than Pascal's betting on the existence of God because whether Japan won or lost, Koreans would earn something regardless.

Yi admitted that cooperation with Japan's war effort would not be entirely free of charge. Somebody would have to pay the price for it albeit it would be minimal compared to the reward. To him, it was nationalist leaders such as Ch'oe Rin, Ch'oe Namsŏn, and Yun Ch'iho who paid for their collaborations by sacrificing their reputations and integrity.[30] Yi contended that they became collaborators because the Japanese took special pains to ensure Korean

nationalists' support for the war effort. The Japanese knew, according to Yi, that they could ultimately win Koreans over with the help of prominent Korean nationalists whose influence over Korean society was immense. In unusual modesty, Yi claimed that he was not as prominent as those nationalist leaders. Accordingly, the Japanese authorities would not push him as hard into active collaboration as they had done with the other nationalist leaders. As a matter of course, Yi contended that he could have avoided collaboration. The Japanese authorities knew well that he had had a bout with sickness while being in jail waiting for his trial and was released on bail for that. He could have used his poor health as an excuse for refusing to actively collaborate. Besides, he and his fellow members of Suyang Tonguhoe had recently been acquitted of all the charges against them, and the authorities would leave him alone for a while. Nevertheless, he continued, he decided to join the other collaborators, who were more prominent than him, "with the same intention that Sim Chŏng had when selling her body to save her father from his suffering."[31] Yi pictured himself as the exemplarily filial daughter, the eponymous heroine of the well-known folktale, "The Story of Sim Chŏng," who sacrificed herself for her blind father to get his sight back. As further examined below, the motif of family runs through his justification for his colonial collaboration. If he represented a filial daughter, who would be the father for whom his sacrifice was made? The answer must have been the Korean nation. In any case, the point Yi repeatedly made was that his collaboration was an act of sacrifice.

Despite his wife's tearful protest and his loyal friends' solemn admonitions, Yi was determined to sacrifice himself, that is, to actively collaborate.[32] For him, collaboration was simultaneously the best thing he could do *for* his nation and the worst thing he could do *to* his nation. The antimonies of collaboration can be understood dialectically as follows. Collaboration with colonial rule is the betrayal of one's nation. None of the colonized can embrace the dreadful fate of a collaborator in good conscience. Thus, it was the last thing Yi wanted to do. But, again, he believed it was the best thing he could do for the nation. The required wager, which was his sacrifice, was minimal and the probable prize was great. Collaboration was the best bet Koreans could make, but few of them were willing to do it. It required martyrs who were willing to take up the task of self-sacrifice. Yi volunteered to become a martyr.

Even if one is sympathetic to Yi's reasoning, it still remains questionable whether his collaboration qualifies as an act of self-sacrifice. Although he insisted he had sacrificed himself, what he argued he had sacrificed was neither his life, nor his wealth, nor his family. It was rather such intangible qualities as honor, pride, reputation, and integrity. If that was the case, could his collaboration constitute self-sacrifice? Were those intangible qualities as important to him as his life—if not more important? Even if they were, the question remains, who received his sacrifice? Was it not the Japanese Empire or the emperor himself, who reigned as a living god and to whom Yi publicly pledged his loyalty? Or, was his sacrifice made to the Korean nation for whom it was offered as well?

No matter what the answers would be, what is certain is Yi indeed offered sacrifices. Being inspired by Pascal's analogy, we can even argue that Yi placed his wager on the support for Japan's war effort. What he undeniably wagered is neither his honor nor his reputation, not even his integrity. The wager that he risked were the lives of young men whom he urged to willingly shed their blood for Japan. Although he did not explicitly acknowledge it, his text betrays that it was they whom he sacrificed for the causes he believed in.

A FATHER'S AGONY

After presenting his reasons for collaboration in detail, Yi appears to end his account of collaboration rather hurriedly by declaring "I will not dwell further on what my collaboration entailed because I believe it is enough for me to explain why I became a collaborator, and there is no need for harking back to it further."[33] He seems to feel he has done enough to justify himself and wants to stop talking about it. He seems to believe it is up to his readers whether to accept his explanation or not. However, as soon as he proclaims that he will leave his decision behind once and for all and move on, he curiously calls attention to his encounters with the young people—he met them while touring to give speeches in support of the Japanese military recruitment campaign targeting Korean students in Japan—as if something keeps drawing him back to the issue of collaboration, and he cannot get away. He claims that he feels urged to recount his "tearful experiences" of encountering the young people.[34]

Yi vividly describes his encounters. The descriptions are so dramatic as well as vivid that you feel as if you are watching meticulously staged theatrical

performances when reading them. Like a good old family drama in which harmony is restored as the parents and children finally embrace each other after turbulent confrontations and conflicts, his account begins with a scene in which he is challenged and confronted by four college students who are visiting him in his hotel room after attending his speech for the Japanese military recruitment campaign. One of them confronts him with the question, "[i]f we fight and die for Japan, will it really benefit our nation?"[35] They demand his assurance that the Korean nation will indeed benefit from their blood to be shed for Japan. In response, he promises, "[i]f Japan does not reward our nation for your blood, I will fight till death."[36] Needless to say, Yi would not need to keep his word because Japan's defeat would make his promise moot. Simultaneously, as the four young men are leaving, one of them delivers his line, "we will not regret it a bit if our younger brothers' generation benefits from our blood to be shed," as another young man comes in, bows without a word and, staying on knees for a while, sheds tears silently, and leaves without saying a word as if he overheard Yi talking to the previous visitors.[37]

Yi also recounts his meeting with several female students which had been arranged by the organizers of his speeches to Korean students in Tokyo, Japan. The young women press him to say what he really wanted to but could not in his public speeches. Instead of giving them what they wanted to hear, he asserts that they must know his true intention for collaboration even if he does not spell it out. When asked what they should do from now on, he offers the same advice that he says he always gives his own daughters, that is, "[w]ork hard in school. The nation lives forever and has its ups and downs. What you can do now is work hard in school."[38] Despite his frustratingly elusive suggestions and advice, the students must have read between the lines and understood him. Yi reports that several days later while he was absent, a group of students came and left what were considered luxurious wartime items including milk, eggs, and charcoal at his hotel for him. He implies that they might have been the same female students who implored him to reveal his true intention of collaboration and sought his advice and to whom he failed to give any straight answer and helpful advice.

The climax of the family drama comes with a twenty-page letter that Yi received from a young woman whom he had never met. He highlights the curious fact that in her letter, she addresses him as father. She explains that

she does so because she has respected him like her own father. Hyperbolically emotional, Yi confides to his readers that he takes the letter as a message not just from one young woman but from the Korean nation.[39] This peculiar move turns the letter writer into a synecdoche for the people. The figure of speech in turn elevates him to the father of the nation because, as he informs his readers, he is like a father to her. Previously, he pictured himself as Sim Chŏng, the filial daughter, who sacrifices herself for her father, the metaphor for the Korean nation. Now, he is becoming the father of the Korean nation through another figure of speech.

The letter must have conveyed a sense of disappointment and disapproval. He describes it as words of "suspicion, resentment, blaming, advice, and admonition" as well as "hope, care, and love." The epistolary author, who regards herself as his spiritual daughter, believes that he fails to speak truthfully in his speeches and writings for Japan's war effort and suggests that he record in detail what he cannot express in public and keep it hidden until better days come. She implores him to take her words as those from a daughter he has never met.[40]

Like the several female students he met in Tokyo, she, the daughter, wants the father to spell out what he cannot say in public, his secrecy, his true intention of collaboration which he cannot share with others not only because he will be persecuted again if the Japanese find out about it but also because the revelation of his secret will jeopardize his true goals of collaboration, his bet on it, and his gambling. His secret is not concealed from her, however. She knows his secret as the female students in Tokyo understood it. At least, that is what the letter implies. She knows what he really wants to say but cannot and thus entreats him to leave some records of it. Perhaps, she predicts, he will get into trouble once the Japanese leave Korea and will feel that he will need something with which he can prove what his true intention of collaboration is. In any case, it must have been communicated to the young people even if he did not spell it out for them. And, now, he reveals his secret, the true intention of his collaboration, years later in his autobiography, for those who have never known it and have denounced him out of their ignorance.

Immediately after introducing the letter, Yi confesses that although he wanted very much to keep it, he had to get rid of it because he was concerned that it would put the epistolary author's safety as well as his own at risk if the Japanese authorities found it. The letter was a secret between him and her,

the father and the daughter until he reveals it in his autobiography. In fact, nobody else is quite certain whether such a letter existed in the first place. Even if one challenged him to present evidence for the existence of such a letter, he could not. However, no one can prove for sure if Yi had fabricated the story to employ the letter as a mouthpiece for defending himself. The truth about it was a secret only Yi knew. Thus, the letter was a secret about his secrecy.

Yi's account about his encounters with the young people finally concludes with a scene in which several young men visit him in his place in Seoul after he came back from a speech tour in Japan. They are students who will enlist with the Japanese army soon. They came to ask him what goals they should have in mind during their military service. Rather than giving them advice, Yi asks them what goals they think they should have. Amazingly, their answers are verbatim and repeat Yi's true reasons for active collaboration, the same reasons he presents in his autobiography years later. "We will fight for Japan because if we refuse to do so, they will persecute our people further. . . . I will join their military so that I will use my military training for Korea's independence in the future. . . . If I come back alive and they still persecute our people, I will turn my rifle on them."[41] Like the young men in Tokyo, these young men in Seoul not only know but also enthusiastically embrace Yi's secret, his true intention toward collaboration. There is no disagreement, neither argument nor confrontation occurring between him and the young men, the father and sons. Yi's sacrificial zeal rubs off on these young men, and they are now willing to sacrifice themselves.

The contagion of sacrificial zeal is a patrilineal instance from which daughters are essentially removed. It is as much patrilineal as the history of modern Korean literature, which began with Yi, the patriarch. It does not mean daughters play no crucial roles in the family drama. They do so by pressing their father to reveal his secrecy. Despite their noticeable presence in the drama, they are, in the end, nudged away from center stage. No daughters are required to take up the task of ultimate sacrifice in this drama although Yi passingly pictures himself as Sim Chŏng, a daughter who sacrificed herself for her father. What daughters are supposed to and expected to do is to try their best to carry on their daily routine as he advises them to "work hard in school." Yi's advice does not necessarily trivialize the importance of everyday life. Rather, it implies that the transmission of sacrificial

duty from one generation to the next is patrilineal. Only sons are obliged to sacrifice for the nation. It is their duty. Only sons are allowed to do so. It is their privilege.[42] The family drama closes with fully restored harmony as the sons confirm their full understanding of their father and his sincerity. As filial sons, they read their father's mind even though he does not spill his secrecy—the secret about his true intention of collaboration.

Why does Yi present his encounters with the young people in the form of a family drama? Why does he position himself as the father of the young men whom he is urging to fight for Japan and sacrifice for Korea? Why does he not share his secret with the young people? Why do they not need him to tell his secret? What does he aim to achieve by picturing himself as the father of the nation?

A False Martyr

I suspect there was a compelling reason why it was necessary for Yi to portray himself as the father of the Korean nation, especially of those young men whom he encouraged to fight for Japan, and it had much to do with his desire to convince himself above all that his collaborationist activities were genuine acts of sacrifice that involved sacrificing his beloved sons. Sacrifice is genuine only if what is sacrificed is irreplaceably valuable to the one who sacrifices. In other words, the sacrificial victim should be the most valuable to the sacrificer if the sacrifice is genuine. What would be more valuable than the life of a son to his father?

By drawing attention to his emotional encounters with the young men whom he prodded into dying for Japan, Yi's own account of his collaboration flashes his image as a father who has to sacrifice his sons against his wish. Momentarily, the image surpasses his overall insistence that it was he himself who was the sacrificial victim of his own collaboration.

In order to better comprehend the nature of sacrifice and secrecy embedded in Yi's account of his encounters with the young people, I would like to read it through another story about a father who kept his secret from his son whom he was going to sacrifice; Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.[43] As noted by many, the biblical story illustrates what absolute sacrifice demands from the sacrificer. Abraham's absolute submission to God's will compelled him to willingly give up the most important thing in his life, the life of his only legitimate son, who God promised would carry on his lineage.

Genuine sacrifice also requires the sacrificer to endure the unbearable loss and guilt afterward. One might even go as far as saying sacrifice in its most fundamental sense is more unbearable for the sacrificer than his own self-sacrifice. The sacrificer should willingly put an end to what is dearest to his heart only to suffer the loss indefinitely. The promise of glory and salvation is not readily available to him. Neither can he share the responsibility and guilt with anyone else.

Thus, Abraham could not tell his son Isaac and his wife Sarah or for that matter, anyone else, what God told him to do with the boy. He kept God's injunction secret as he rode on a donkey, taking his son along with two servants to Mountain Moriah where God demanded he sacrifice his son. Even when Isaac asked him where the offering for sacrifice to God was, he did not reveal who the sacrificial victim would be. Instead he told his son, whom he was sacrificing soon, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."[44]

Søren Kierkegaard, one of the most insightful readers of the story of Abraham and Isaac, ascribes the father's silence to the limits of language that cannot communicate the truth of a singular individual to others when the truth contradicts morality, which is a generality.[45] Kierkegaard interprets Abraham's willingness to kill his son as the most exemplary case of a single individual's absolute commitment to what he believes in. Such commitment suspends the generality of morality. Killing a human being is morally wrong. A father who is willing to kill his own flesh and blood is extremely abominable by any reasonable moral standard. Nevertheless, Abraham is willing to transgress the generally accepted moral code for his truth, which is singular, that is, his faith in God. The caveat is his religious suspension of morality does not obviate morality itself. On the contrary, it confirms the validity and necessity of morality. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son was the manifestation of his deep faith in God exactly because it goes against morality, which is universally valid and necessary. If it squares with morality, anybody will easily take up the task without guilt. Only an extraordinarily pious believer like Abraham can measure up to the unbearable task.

Abraham was willing not only to put his own son to death but also to accept full responsibility for it. Silence was integral to his acceptance of responsibility. If God had not withdrawn his injunction, he would have sacrificed his son and silently endured the blame for the killing and the stigma of

a murderer of his own son. When he is about to lay his knife at Isaac's throat, Isaac must have been utterly petrified by his father's sudden violence as he could not understand why his father attempted to kill him. Even after God returned Isaac alive to Abraham, the father did not explain to his son why he had attempted to murder him. He did not try to justify his murderous act by saying that he attempted to kill his son because God told him to. Neither did he confess to his son that he had to follow God's injunction to uphold his faith in Him, nor did he beg his son's understanding. The revelation of his true intention would not have changed the fact that he was willing to murder his son. There was no way for him to make his truth intelligible to others because it is singular and thus cannot be communicated to others. Therefore, Kierkegaard argues that Abraham kept silent. Language cannot help Abraham, a single individual, convey to others the meaning of his absolute truth because language can address only generality. Even if he had tried to explain why he attempted to sacrifice his own son, nobody would have understood him. Abraham is the father of those who believe because in order to uphold his faith, he was willing to take up the task—the meaning of which nobody else would understand—and to endure "the martyrdom of unintelligibility."[46]

Somewhat similarly to Abraham as portrayed in Kierkegaard's interpretation, Yi remained reticent when asked by the young people to share his secret, his true intention of collaboration, which he could not reveal in his public speeches and writings. Despite his silence, they knew his secret—in stark contrast to Isaac, who must have had no clue to his father's act of violence. As noted earlier, Yi highlights the fact that not only did they understand his secret but also they embraced it and chose to willingly sacrifice themselves even though Yi did not spell his true intention out for them. In other words, his true intention for collaboration was not really a secret. It was communicated to others even without the mediation of language. Why did he persistently stress that the young men were well aware of his intention? Kierkegaard's distinction of the "knight of faith" from the "tragic hero" might be relevant here to further understand Yi's insistence. According to Kierkegaard, in contrast to Abraham—the knight of faith, who transgressed the general norm in order to uphold his singular truth—Agamemnon, an exemplary figure representing the tragic hero, did not keep silent about his truth. On the contrary, Agamemnon's truth was well understood by others including his sacrificial victim, his daugh-

ter Iphigenia, because the truth did not conflict with the general norm but upheld it.[47] It is a morally noble feat for the leader to sacrifice his beloved daughter for the benefit of his community.[48]

By insisting that his truth, his true intention of collaboration, was understood by the young men, does Yi imply that he sacrificed them for the nation and his truth did not go against the general norm of nationalism? Is he trying to present himself as a tragic hero, who had to sacrifice his beloved sons for his nation?

On the one hand, his account of his encounter with the young people reveals that it was not Yi but the young men who were sacrificed for the Korean nation. On the other hand, Yi ultimately denies that they were the sacrificial victims of his collaboration. He insists in the end that they chose to sacrifice themselves on their own. They understood Yi's secret, his true intention of collaboration, even though others did not. They agreed with him that they should sacrifice themselves. In other words, Yi's account confirms and affirms the young men's active agency in their decision making by ultimately implying that it was their own decision to sacrifice themselves for the nation.

When portraying himself as the father of the young people, he might have projected onto himself the image of Abraham who had to sacrifice his beloved son for his belief. Unlike Isaac whom God returned alive to Abraham however, many of Yi's sacrificial victims never came back. Furthermore, Yi failed to follow through with the most frightening but essential task of a sacrificer. Absolute sacrifice requires the sacrificer's absolute acceptance of responsibility for the destruction and violence he brought upon his sacrificial victims. Unlike Abraham, who accepted full responsibility for his murderous act of sacrificing his son by keeping silent and remaining vulnerably exposed to blame and stigmatization, Yi denied in the end that he was willing to put the young men, his spiritual sons, into danger to uphold his truth, the belief that collaboration was the best thing he could do for his nation.

Unlike Agamemnon who justified the killing of his own daughter as an act of sacrifice for the benefit of his community, Yi could not admit that he sacrificed the young men for the Korean nation. He may not have had the courage to face the carnage of his sacrifice. More importantly however, even if he had had such courage, he could not have justified his sacrifice of the young men because there was no general consensus among the members

of his community as to whether his act of collaboration did actually benefit the community as he claimed or not. With his account that simultaneously reveals it was not him but the young men who were sacrificed and denies his responsibility for their sacrifice, Yi washes his bloody hands, implying it was their decision to sacrifice themselves for the nation and that he is innocent of these men's blood. Neither knight of faith nor tragic hero, Yi Kwangsu was a false martyr.

A Priest and His Burnt Offerings

Long before defending his colonial collaboration as an act of self-sacrifice in his autobiography, *My Confession*, Yi once portrayed himself as a priest, who is offering sacrifices to God, in a letter to his wife, who was in Japan for her medical training. In the letter written in the same year when he published the infamous "Minjok kaejoron" (A theory of national reconstruction), he told his wife that one day, he had woken up early in the morning experiencing sudden raptures and the following thought had crossed his mind.[49]

> A new day has come. I will cleanse myself and enter God's temple because I am a priest. I am the priest who prays and gives burnt offerings for the heaven and the earth, and all their multitude from dawn to dusk. I must be pure, diligent, dignified, prudent, and always awake. Every single piece of my work is that of a holy priest. I get deep, restful sleep only to restore my strength so that I can carry on the holy task assigned by the new day.[50]

What is most conspicuous about the above passage is its explicit employment of biblical imagery, especially from that of the Jewish Bible. Yi proclaims that he is devoting his life to his calling, which has metamorphosed into that of a priest in the service of God. Who is this God that demands burnt offerings (*pŏnje*)?[51] His God must be the Korean nation to which he repeatedly pledged his devotion. Then, what are the burnt offerings he is willing to give to his God? The most plausible answer seems to be his work, every single piece of which is done in service to his God.

As discussed earlier, Yi was constantly fascinated with the ideas of martyrdom, that which entails the self-sacrifice of risking one's life to bear witness to his or her truth. Interestingly in the passage, he did not use the metaphor of "martyr" to emphasize his devotion to the nation as he did in his other

writings. In order to achieve the same rhetorical effect, he used the metaphor of "priest" who gives burnt offerings instead. Although he seems to have meant his work by "burnt offerings," his peculiar choice of the words "priest" and "burnt offerings" leaves us wondering why he departed from his usual pet metaphors, "martyr" and "martyrdom." Did his letter prophetically predict that his devotion to his nation would not result in his self-sacrifice as a martyr but require "burnt offerings," a holocaust, the destruction of lives, and the sacrifice of the young men?

As examined above, Yi argued that he had collaborated because it was the best bet he could make after thorough and careful calculations made by taking various possibilities into consideration. Yi's justification of colonial collaboration as sacrifice poses the question that concerns the economic schema embedded in the convergence of sacrifice and gambling. In this schema, sacrifice is considered to be a payment for the higher cause. However, it is not the usual payment which one makes to get what one wants. Because there is no guarantee that one will necessarily achieve what one desires even if one pays for it, that is, one sacrifices for it, sacrifice as a payment is also a wager one must make. In other words, no matter how certain Yi was about the successful outcome of Korean collaboration with Japanese rule, it would be entirely contingent on the ultimate response of the Japanese to the collaboration of the colonized. As discussed above, it was exactly because of this uncertainty that the young men whom Yi urged to fight for Japan demanded the assurance from Yi that Koreans would indeed benefit from their sacrifice. This means that no matter how meticulously calculated Yi's reasoning was, in the end, whether his collaboration would bring about the result he expected or not was not a certainty but a probability. As long as the desirable outcome of Korean collaboration was not completely certain but merely probable, collaboration was a gamble and Koreans' payment for its desirable outcome, that is their sacrifice for it, was a wager. Gambling and sacrifice and economism and nationalism were thus merged in Yi's logic of collaboration.

In his book, *The Gift of Death*, Jacques Derrida tackles the economic logic of sacrifice by offering his own reading of the story of Abraham and Isaac in dialogue with Kierkegaard's interpretation of it.[52] According to Derrida, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, or to be more exact Abraham's decision to sacrifice Isaac, transcends the logic of economics embedded in sacrifice because Abraham did not decide to sacrifice his son, expecting that God would save

him from the ordeal in the end or God would reward him for his faith one way or another. Abraham did not know God would bless him and his descendants for his devotion to God's will. Abraham's decision did not result from his cunning calculation that took all variables and possibilities into account and lead him to bet on the best possible outcome. He decided to sacrifice his own son only to uphold his singular truth—which was his faith in God—without calculating the cost and profit of sacrifice at all nor feeling complacent about the choice.[53]

For Derrida, the story essentially poses to us the question of how to take responsibility. The father-son story reminds us of the fact that we constantly sacrifice someone or something for another because sacrifice is indispensable to making decisions. To be responsible for our obligation and duty to someone or something, we cannot help sacrificing our responsibility to another because we cannot take on the same degree of responsibility for everyone and everything even if we try to be responsible for every single Other. As Abraham chose to be responsible for his obligation to God, he had to be morally irresponsible by deciding to kill his son. In the same fashion, in our daily life we constantly have to choose someone or something over another and prioritize him or her, or this or that and thus fail in our responsibility to all things. In other words, we cannot help being irresponsible (to someone or something) in order to be responsible (to another thing).[54] Whenever we complacently believe that we have made the best decision with all things considered, we fail to see the irresponsibility inherent in our decision-making. Put differently, we cannot help being remiss in our duties one way or another.

The conflict inherent in taking responsibility leads us to look at the problem of the economic logic implicated in the reasoning behind Yi's collaboration. As mentioned earlier, Yi decided to collaborate with the Japanese colonial government due to the result of his meticulous calculations. It is as if he wagered his bet on the best possible outcome. He failed to admit that by making such a decision and putting his belief into practice, he ended up sacrificing others, the young men who were forced to fight for their colonial masters. No matter how sincere he was about upholding his truth, what is certain is he failed to see the perversity implicated in the figuration of the support of the colonized for their colonial master's war effort as sacrifice, a perversity that is highlighted by the convergence of human sacrifice and gambling.

NOTES

1. Kim Hyŏn, "Yi Kwangsu munhak ŭi chŏnbanjŏk kŏmt'o" [A survey of Yi Kwangsu's literature], 4: 347–66.

2. Ibid., 362.

3. Kim Ch'ŏl locates a desire for the unblemished and unified collective identity of the Korean nation in an attempt to downplay the crucial contribution of Yi and his novel *Mujŏng* to the development of modern Korean literature. According to Kim, such an attempt is derived from the nationalist denunciation of Yi's colonial collaboration rather than from any objective assessment of his literature. For Kim, the frequent denunciation of Yi's literature for his colonial collaboration is problematic for its collectivist tendency. Kim Ch'ŏl, "Sŏmun, tasi *Mujŏng* ŭl ingnŭnda" [Preface: Rereading *Heartless*], 5–21.

4. The majority of literary scholars and critics acknowledge the decisive contribution of Yi and his novel *Mujŏng* to the birth of modern Korean literature. This majority opinion is reflected in Ann Sung-Hi Lee's introduction to her English translation of Yi's novel *Mujŏng*. Ann Sung-Hi Lee, *Yi Kwang-su and Modern Korean Literature:* Mujŏng, 1–74. The acknowledgement was already put forth by Yi's contemporaries. For example, in his 1934 *Chosŏn sosŏlsa* (History of the Korean novel), Kim T'aejun highly evaluated the role of Yi's literary work in the development of the modern Korean novel. Im Hwa also noted the special importance of Yi and his work in the emergence of modern literature in Korea in his 1935 essays on modern Korean literature, which were serialized in the newspaper *Chosŏn chungang ilbo* (Korea central daily). Most of the major works on modern Korean literary history acknowledge Yi's crucial role in the development of modern Korean literature to varying degrees, following the lead of Kim and Im. For more information, see Kim T'aejun, *Chosŏn sosŏlsa* [History of the Korean novel], 252–55; Im Hwa, *Im Hwa chŏnjip* [Collected works of Im Hwa], 2: 24–37; Paek Ch'ŏl, *Chosŏn sinmunhak sajosa* [History of new literary trends in Korea], 73–114; and Cho Yŏnhyŏn, *Han'guk hyŏndae munhaksa* [History of modern Korean literature], 125–41. There are quite a few dissenting voices, however. Kim Tongin, Yi's younger contemporary and a prominent writer himself, credited the *sinsosŏl* (new novel) writer Yi Injik with being the first modern novelist in Korea and regarded Yi Kwangsu as the one who continued to develop the modern novel further following Yi Injik's lead. New novel is a transitional literary form of fictional narratives that developed in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Korea. On the other hand, Cho Tongil considers Yi's *Mujong* to be less than a modern novel because it shares many characteristics with such works of new novel genre as Yi Injik's. For more information, see Kim Tongin, *Kim Tongin chŏnjip* [Collected works of Kim Tongin], 6: 148; Cho Tongil, *Han'guk munhak t'ongsa* [Historical survey of Korean literature], 5: 450–54.

5. Needless to say, this does not mean that there have been no significant female writers and poets in modern Korean literature. It rather means that they are marginal-

ized in most historical accounts of modern Korean literature. Their marginalization is indicated by the fact that the modifier "female" or "woman" (*yŏryu* or *yŏsŏng*) is always attached to their titles.

6. The issue of Japanese literary influence over the development of modern Korean literature has been heatedly debated since the late Colonial Period when Im Hwa put forth his view of modern Korean literature as a product of the transplantation of Western literature through Japanese mediation. Although Im's view has been denounced by many for its emphasis on the discontinuity between the indigenous literary tradition and modern literature in Korea, it cannot be denied that modern Korean literature indeed emerged under Japanese cultural influence due to Japan's colonial expansion into and rule over Korea. In that sense, Hwang Jongyon's essays on Yi's idea of literature and his novel *Mujong* are relevant to understanding Yi's literary text in relation to the issue. Hwang analyzes the way in which Yi's view of literature was deeply indebted to the Japanese meditation of Western aesthetic and literary ideas and demonstrates that the first modern Korean novel implicitly acknowledges the legitimacy of the Japanese colonial authorities. Im Hwa, *Im Hwa chŏnjip*, 2: 73–370; Hwang Jongyon, "The Emergence of Aesthetic Ideology in Modern Korean Literature," 5–35; and Hwang Jongyon, "The Story of the Novel in Korea," 209–29.

7. One of the representative works, which link Yi's collaboration to his nationalist beliefs, is Cho Kwanja's "The Formation and Bankruptcy of Pro-Japanese Nationalism: Beyond the Judgement that Yi Kwangsu was a Traitor of the Nation." In this article published in a Japanese journal *Gendai Shisō* (Modern thought), Cho argues that there was a logical continuity between Yi's earlier call for the renovation of the Korean nation and his later explicit support of Japanese colonial rule. For more information, see Cho Kwanja, "Shinnichi nashonarizumu no keisei to hatan: Yi Kwangsu, minzoku hangyakusha to iu shinkyū o koete" [Formation of colonial nationalism and its bankruptcy: Looking beyond the framing of Yi Kwangsu as a national traitor].

8. Following are some examples of Yi's perversely fervent writing and speeches. Yi Kwangsu, "Ch'angssi wa na" [Changing the family name, my case]; Kayama Mitsurō (Yi's Japanese name), "Sensō to bungaku" [War and literature]; and Kayama Mitsurō, "Naisen ittai zuisōroku" [Essay on Japan-Korea one body].

9. Kim Yunsik, *Yi Kwangsu wa kŭ ŭi sidae kaejŏng chŭngbop'an* [Yi Kwangsu and his era, revised version], 1: 15.

10. Ibid., 1: 29–52.

11. Ibid., 1: 173.

12. Examples of Yi Hyŏngsik's fatherly love for his students can be found in Yi Kwangsu, *Parojabŭn* Mujŏng [Heartless, restored version], 128–30; 165–67; 406–37.

13. Yi Kwangsu, *Na ŭi kobaek* [My confession].

14. Ibid., 32.

15. In his influential book on autobiographies, Philippe Lejeune concludes that there are no rigid boundaries between an autobiography and such fictional narratives as the autobiographical novel. He argues that what makes an autobiography is not inherent in the writing itself. It is rather the "autobiographical pact," a form of contract between the author and the reader in which the reader and the author agree on the identicalness of the author, the narrator, and the subject of the story. Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*.

16. Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement."

17. The difficulty of distinguishing between autobiography and fiction especially pertains to examining Yi's literary works because, as noted by a number of scholars of modern Korean literature, many of Yi's literary works are autobiographical. Besides, Yi wrote three autobiographical novels, which were explicitly based on his own life; *Kŭ ŭi chasŏjŏn* [His autobiography] written in 1936, and *Na, sonyŏngp'yŏn* [I, a boy] and its sequel *Na, sŭmusal kogae* [I, at the age of twenty] published in 1947 and 1948 respectively. Yi Kwangsu, *Kŭ ŭi chasŏjŏn* in *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip*, 9: 239–455; and *Na, sonyŏngp'yŏn*, in *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip*, 11: 341–449; and *Na, sŭmusal kogae*, in *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip*, 11: 451–573. A number of noticeable parallels between the fictional narratives and the trajectory of Yi's life lend so much verisimilitude to his autobiographical novels that the reader, unless being extremely cautious, is likely to conflate the narrator of the fictional stories, the subjects of the stories, and the historical individual.

18. Yi was acutely aware of the difference between an autobiography and a biography. In the preface of *Na ŭi kobaek*, he begs the reader's understanding that he cannot faithfully recount what others thought and did in the book because it is an autobiographical account of what he, Yi, did. Yi Kwangsu, *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 13: 32.

19. Besides, there are quite a few pieces of textual evidence that appear to indicate that Yi believed he had collaborated only for the good of his nation. For example, he expressed his frustration with the growing public criticism of his colonial collaboration in an unpublished poem titled "In'gwa" (Cause and effect). The poem ends with the following lines "Being Yi Kwangsu, who has lived and will die only for the nation, I am not ashamed of myself. The heavens and the earth know it and God must know it. Perhaps, some of my people in this world might know it as well. No, even if there is nobody who knows it, there is nothing I can do about it and it is alright. For I did what I had to." Yi Kwangsu, *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip*, 19: 265–67.

20. As is well known, Yi was arrested on a charge of collaborationist activities by the newly established South Korean government in 1949. The charge against him was dropped in the same year. Kim Yunsik, *Yi Kwangsu wa kŭ ŭi sidae kaejŏng ch'ungbop'an* 2: 436–43.

21. With the help of normative ethics and examples of collaboration with the German occupation forces in Europe during the Second World War, John Treat has

criticized Yi's colonial collaboration. John Treat, "Choosing to Collaborate." As the remaining part of my chapter clarifies, my approach to the issue of Yi's collaboration is entirely different from Treat's. Rather than merely passing moral judgement, I deal with the problem of sacrifice embedded in Yi's justification of collaboration by highlighting what his autobiography betrays about his collaborationist activities, contrary to its overall insistence that he sacrificed himself for his nation.

22. Kim Punggu observes that Yi's self-identification as a martyr developed much earlier in his life and was derived from his sense of superiority over other fellow Koreans. Kim Punggu, *Han'gugin kwa munhak sasang* [Koreans and literary theory], 99–101.

23. Kim Yunsik, *Yi Kwangsu wa kŭ ŭi sidae kaejŏng chŭngbop'an*, 2: 506–9.

24. Yi Kwangsu, *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 17: 292–93.

25. Ibid., 13: 32–33.

26. Ibid., 13: 263.

27. Ibid., 13: 267.

28. Ibid., 13: 268–69.

29. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, 154.

30. Yi Kwangsu, *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 13: 270.

31. Ibid., 13: 271.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., 13: 272.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., 13: 273.

39. Ibid., 13: 273–74.

40. Ibid., 13: 274.

41. Ibid., 13: 275.

42. It goes without saying that the privileging of men over women can be possible only if one completely ignores the historical fact that many Korean women were also mobilized for Japan's war effort. The mobilization of comfort women was the most egregious among many cases of the forced assembly of Korean women.

43. Gen. 22:1–19.

44. Ibid., 22: 8.

45. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*.

46. Ibid., 70.

47. In *Fear and Trembling*, the example of the tragic hero comes from the Greek dramatist Euripides (480–406 BCE)'s play *Iphigenia in Aulis*. In the play, the oracle Calchas

tells Agamemnon, the commander of the Greek forces, that he should sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis in order to entreat the goddess to blow a strong wind so that the Greek fleet could sail to conquer Troy.

48. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 51–55.

49. It is noteworthy that even before Yi earnestly collaborated with the Japanese colonial authorities, he had already been harshly denounced by many of his readers for his reformist and gradualist attitude toward Korean independence which he had put forth in his 1922 treatise titled "Minjok kaejoron" [A theory of national reconstruction] in Yi Kwangsu, *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip*, 13: 251–52.

50. Yi Kwangsu, *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip*, 18: 494.

51. The direct translation of *pŏnje* is "burnt offerings;" however, it is translated into English as "holocaust."

52. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret*.

53. Ibid., 94–96.

54. Ibid., 54–81.

6

The Political Dynamics of Sacrifice and the Sacrificial Narrative in Modern Korea: The State and the Historical Ontology of Student Soldiers

YERIM KIM

The Japanese Empire needed, generated, and managed the countless deaths of the governed. The death product system implemented by the Japanese Empire mainly covered the East Asian region but eventually spread to Southeast Asia as its wartime regime increased in scale by the end of the 1930s. In that respect, Mark Driscoll's analysis of the politics of Japanese colonial authorities is relevant to better understand the way in which Japanese colonial rule operated within the framework of necropolitcs. Driscoll attempts to describe the mechanism of Japan's fascist rule with a focus on death, highlighting both the relation to and the difference from that of biopolitics and neuropolitics. He categorizes and periodizes the government modes of the Japanese Empire into biopolitics (1890–1914), neuropolitics (1920–36), and necropolitics (1932–45). In terms of biopolitics he pays attention to Chinese coolies, human traffickers, Korean tenant farmers, and Japanese sex workers. According to Driscoll, neuropolitics is relevant to erotic-grotesque modernism, including Japanese sexology and capitalistic media, which constructed modern subjectivities through stimulating the body, nervous system, and sensibility.[1] According to Driscoll, the Japanese system of necropolitics began with the development of Manchuria in the early 1930s. It was practiced and realized through comfort women, forced laborers, and opium addicts, all of whom were conclusive proof of the empire's preference to "death and incapacitation."[2]

NECROPOLITICS AND THE PRODUCTION OF SACRIFICE

In carrying out war, necropolitics became an indispensable and essential mechanism, as it was the state's ability not simply to cause death itself but to

manage the deaths and the dynamics by which such deaths were created, utilized, handled, and adapted for war. Because war is one of the "big businesses" of the state, necropolitics—as well as biopolitics—should be examined as a governing strategy. When we take into account the profound relationship between death and the state, we can fully understand the political meaning of sacrifice, or the sacrificial narrative, and its usefulness. Takahashi Tetsuya takes note of this point in *Kukka wa hŭisaeng* (Nation and sacrifice). He explains the logic of sacrifice as a kind of apparatus invented by the state, as it faced the problem of how to mobilize the people and how to treat the war dead and their bereaved families. His work shows that the sacrifice which originally had religious meaning came to have strong secular functions in the historical process of desacralization. The state values certain deaths, making them sublime or beautiful sacrifices for the national community. Through such selective signifying practices, the collective illusion and belief that someone has met a glorious death can be shared.[3]

It is primarily soldiers and their deaths that are appropriated by the state. The soldiers, who are ordered to fight and to lay down their lives for their country, lie at the core of the dynamics of necropolitics. In other words, it could be called a right of the state to demand sacrifice. Such a phenomenon has continuously appeared in Korean history and has been invoked in the building of the South Korean nation and the making of its people. Paradoxically, it was when Koreans were left without their nation-state that they experienced the overwhelmingly large-scale system of modern necropolitics. Imperial Japan needed the bodies and blood of the colonized, and young Korean men were forced to give their lives for their colonial master's war effort. It is well known that many Korean intellectuals urged the younger generations to think of their military service as a meaningful and sacred opportunity to express their loyalty to Japan. Through this symbolic manipulation process, the Japanese government registered Korean soldiers as having tough spirits and devoted bodies. They were elevated to the status of heroes in death by various colonized agents, who were willing to undertake the intermediary role of messengers of the empire and its colonial authorities. Propaganda that supported military mobilization under the wartime regime exuded groundless optimism, which hid or erased the reality of the colonized. This will be the first scene to be closely examined in this chapter for the contextualization of the history of sacrifice and the sacrifice narrative in Korea.

In this chapter special attention is paid to two sacrificial narratives: (1) Japanese colonial propaganda targeting Koreans; and (2) the sacrificial narrative in Korea after its liberation from Japanese colonial rule. The second important scene of sacrifice and the sacrificial narrative began after 1945. Many people who had left Korea during the Colonial Period began to return after Liberation, including many soldiers. In those days, they were called *chŏnjaemin* (war victims) or *chŏnjae tongp'o* (victimized compatriots). The general public opinion about the repatriates was that they should be entitled to social care and relief.[4] It was commonly understood that they were forced to leave their homeland or hometown because of economic difficulty or conscription, and that they should now be respected and treated as faithful members of the new nation.[5] Fraternal sympathy and nationalistic passion toward those who returned were widespread sentiments following Liberation, but these were not the sole components of the socio-political milieu as the Cold War began in Korea and abroad. Liberation, a postponed independence, and the division of the peninsula led to further complications of the political situation. Under such circumstances, new sacrifices of the (returned) soldiers began to be made, and new sacrificial narratives about them were written.

How, then, did the system of sacrifice and the sacrificial narrative change after the beginning of the Cold War? To trace the trajectory of changes, we must look at the genealogy of sacrifice and the sacrificial narrative that was constructed during both the colonial and the post-colonial periods. For an in-depth investigation into the problems of sacrifice, we need to consider sacrifice, or what is determined or decided to be sacrifice, rather than regard its meaning as self-evident. Therefore, the following questions should be posed: what creates the sense of being sacrificed, and who (or what) decides how the sacrifice is recognized? By answering these questions, we will be able to examine the discursive field in which conflicting forces were competing to define the meanings of the words "justice," "legitimacy," "virtue," and "vice" concerning sacrifice. Thus, I intend to explore the ways in which sacrifice and the sacrificial narrative were historically imagined and constructed, rather than who or how many were sacrificed.

By taking this approach to the issue of sacrifice, I do not intend to ignore the apparent fact that acts of violence were committed against many people in modern Korea or that the agent of that violence was the state. I believe this

approach enables us to better understand the dynamics of sacrifice and the sacrificial narrative.

In order to answer the questions of the politics of sacrifice and the sacrificial narrative, I will examine the history of Korean student soldiers. This group emerged during Japan's Pacific War in 1943. They shared significant political, socio-economic, and cultural features. First, they made up the majority of Koreans who had official military experience in post-Liberation Korea. Second, they came primarily from the class of economic wealth and possessed educational capital because they were beneficiaries of higher education. Finally, thanks to their high degree of literacy, they left their own accounts of their experiences about the war and about the difficulties of army life. Because of the common features mentioned above, these student soldiers became both the producers and the products of stories of colonial days—which are the constructs of a complicated nexus of the war and the state that not only mirrors but also responds to the macro-political order. These student soldiers are the focal points in this chapter's close examination of the dynamics of sacrifice and the sacrificial narrative.

STUDENT SOLDIER: THE FLOWER OF THE STATE OR THE NATION

The subject of Korean soldiers in the Japanese military during the Colonial Period needs to be approached from the perspective of demography because they actually belonged to two different groups in terms of their social positions and the time of their military mobilization. Young Korean men began to respond to the Japanese Empire's military mobilization in 1938 when the Yukkun t'ŭkpyŏl chiwŏnbyŏng ryŏng (Army Special Volunteers Act) was implemented. About five years later, the Hakto chiwŏnbyŏngje (Student draft program) was announced, and universal conscription was finally implemented in 1944. It was through such mobilization programs through which the young generation of the colonized were summoned to the field of death and violence in the name of volunteerism or spontaneity. While many young men were dragged into the empire's war, many Korean ideologues of the older generation dreamt of a better future in which Koreans, at the cost of young blood, would advance to higher positions in the ethnic and political hierarchies of the Japanese Empire.

> It is thanks to the benevolent emperor that Koreans are allowed to serve as volunteer soldiers. This proves the virtue of patriotism Koreans have demonstrated since the China Incident [Marco Polo Bridge Incident]. To recruit Koreans as soldiers gives them an opportunity to join in defending the [Japanese] nation. I am well aware that this is not just about mobilizing the military force of two or ten thousand, so I can appreciate the thoughtfulness of the emperor. How much will Koreans rejoice when they hear the message that you bear the destiny of the nation on your shoulders![6]

> When military conscription deferment for students in higher education was abolished, the Japanese students could have the honor of going to war. But your sons [Koreans] were conscripted as laborers into the industrial sector as if they were left behind where they were. I do not mean to say that it is humiliating to serve as a laborer. However, it would be regrettable if your sons only served as laborers while their Japanese colleagues join in [the army] as commissioned officers—even though both left for the South Seas together. What a great honor it is that through the student draft program we can now join the Japanese on the front line with equal qualification![7]

The first quote illustrates the welcoming of the implementation of the volunteer program in colonial Korea, while the second quote draws on the typical logic that induced student soldiers to voluntarily enlist. The programs and (potential) applicants were all praised enthusiastically in Korea; however, the two "voluntary" programs targeted two different groups. Higuchi Yūichi explores how the Japanese Empire took into consideration and used the class structure and hierarchical order in Korean society in *Senjika Chōsen no minshū to chōhei* (Conscription and Korea's masses during wartime). It was mostly middle-class youth who were targeted in the 1938 volunteer program. According to Higuchi, those who had applied to be volunteer soldiers before the student draft program began were mostly considered middle class in terms of their economic and intellectual backgrounds. Ninety percent of the volunteer soldiers graduated from public elementary school (kongnip pot'ong hakkyo) and had acquired basic Japanese communication skills because Japanese fluency was required for military training.[8]

Another important point in understanding the Korean student soldier position in colonial society, from the perspective of demography, is the appli-

cants' occupations. According to the statistics that Higuchi presents, the majority (about 56 percent) were engaged in agriculture. In fact, large numbers of volunteer soldiers were young unemployed laborers due to the structural contradictions of rural society and of the unemployment crisis under colonialization.[9] Higuchi reveals the dark side of reality behind the loud voice praising the service and achievement of the volunteer soldiers and military civilian employees. The movie *Chiwŏnbyŏng* (Volunteer), a propagandistic film made in 1941, sketches the situation of that time and the reality of becoming a volunteer soldier. The main character, a farm manager who supervised tenant farmers, lost his job and was despondent about his hopeless situation with no foreseeable career prospects. He then discovered a chance for a new life as a soldier in the volunteer army program. Apparently *Chiwŏnbyŏng* follows the trite narrative structure commonly found in wartime discourse. However, the film's description of the gloomy landscape of rural society and the grey mentality of the jobless and powerless young men goes beyond the propagandistic surface layer to touch upon the depth of melancholy of the mobilized poor.[10] Self-betrayals—or, as it were, the cracks or dislocations between the depth and the surface, which occur prevalently in this text—are impressive.

While the identity of the first group of soldiers, who came from the middle class, was formed by the socio-economic structure imposed on them at the macro level and individuals' hardships, expectations, and various desires at the micro level, the student soldiers had quite different backgrounds and characteristics. As mentioned earlier, most of the soldiers were forced to "volunteer" for the Japanese imperial army. Although the student soldier program had the appearance of a volunteer system, it was, in actuality, coercive and compulsory. Therefore, even though the two systems in 1938 and 1942 shared all of the marks of the beginning of necropolitics, the implications of "volunteering" in each of them were not necessarily the same. It was almost impossible for students to escape the empire's thorough conscription surveillance network. It was pervasive. Writings that supported the empire's necropolitics and praised the glorious deaths of youth became prevalent in public discourse, including articles written by student soldiers themselves.[11]

> There is nothing more important than life and death. Everyone is destined to die once he is born. Then, how do we die? In the way of our death lies the

> fruitful meaning of our coming to this world. We die but should not die a meaningless death. To fight and to die gloriously for the country, and at last to remain alive as the gods protecting our country. This is the death of the Japanese. All of the students on the peninsula will go the way of death for the country! Will we just die? A fruitless death only means a fruitless life. Therefore, we should die for a worthy and meaningful life. There is only one way. It is to live and die as Japanese![12]

As seen above, students seemed to respond positively to the state's necropolitics, judging from their voices that appeared in newspapers and magazines during wartime. But given the general situation of the media and direct or indirect censorship of that time, it is not hard to understand that these exaggerated statements were just a thin veil that covered the complicated mentality of these young intellectuals. Compared to the middle-class youth, they were relatively free from the hardships of life. Clearly, highly educated students had been protected in various ways from the struggles for survival or the fatigue of livelihood, but this protective cover broke down under the military mobilization regime. This situation made Korean students sink into a sense of crisis, fear, and skepticism about their deaths. It goes without saying that these students were unable to frankly express any sense of agony at that time. Kim Sŏngsu, an influential educator in colonial Korea explained that their anxiety derived from worries about "death," "family," and "the state."[13] However the point of Kim's statement was to focus not on the students' deep anxiety itself, but on the importance of the strong courage required to overcome it.

Thus, young Korean men during wartime, whether they belonged to the lower middle class or to the intellectual and economic upper class, must have accepted their chances and their duty to die. For both death and the management of death, the state provided memorial ceremonies. Commemorations were necessary and indispensable to managing the war and to presenting it as a common cause of the nation. Various forms of memorial services for the war dead were held within the empire's territories, including cities in Manchuria and in Korea. In Korea, these were often held in cities such as P'yŏngyang (1937), Kaesŏng (1938), Kyŏngsŏng (1939), and others. At one joint memorial ceremony in 1940, held in It'aewŏn (a neighborhood of Kyŏngsŏng), dead soldiers, war horses, military dogs, and military carrier

pigeons were all celebrated together.[14] The empire's sense of consolation and mourning extended to the dead bodies and "noble" souls of animals, as well as those of humans. In this way, the state could appropriate all of the deaths. In the public space and time of memorial ceremonies, not only the sacrifice of the dead was commemorated but also a sense of deep grief was shared by everyone. However, on such occasions the voices of patriotism were prone to echo and swallow up the sentiments in the name of the state itself. The instances in which the deaths of people, the empire's invocation of various types of rhetoric, and its apparatus for controlling deaths were presented to fundamentally show the power and technology of state necropolitics.

As mentioned before, the discourse that admired death for the empire and urged young people to go to war circulated in the Korean media under the wartime regime. Thus, it may be almost meaningless or useless to read many of the typical pieces of literature repeating the same argument. Yet, a very rare and exceptional—and thus noteworthy—confession appeared in Kim Yongje's short story "Sōtei" (The strong young man) written in Japanese in 1944. The story directly examines the inner conflicts of the main character, who was in a state of confusion after receiving a letter announcing the death of his nephew. The narrator of this story, a writer and member of the Aegukpan (Patriotic neighborhood association), was preparing a tour to visit the physical examination sites of the young conscripts in Hamgyŏng Province. According to his explanation, he and other writers had planned to write and publish moving and admirable stories about the war effort after seeing the Korean young men who tried to "fight with blood and win a victory in the Great East Asia War."[15] Actually, he enjoyed the meaningful tour and was deeply impressed by "the collective atmosphere of pure and intense righteousness" that surrounded the young Korean people.[16]

However, when the narrator was making plans for a consolation tour of the thirteen provinces for Korean soldiers, military civilian employees, and the war dead and their families, he received an unexpected letter from his home in the countryside. The letter informed him that his nephew, serving as a military civilian employee, had died on the battlefield. At this point the narrator falls into deep sadness and confusion.

> If I could cry, I'd cry so loudly, but I did not shed tears. Right here, the war is going on. I clenched my teeth in silence. My eyes never moved as I stared at

> the petals of the iris. Should I carry out the plan for visiting the soldiers' families in each province starting tomorrow or should I first rush to my dead nephew's birthplace? I was debating alone.[17]

He is talking not about the armed conflict between countries but about his internal conflict. In general, such an internal conflict between the sense of responsibility for public duty and the private pain in confronting death was not clearly expressed or described in detail in the literature at that time. In particular, the fact that the narrator could not make up his mind is especially explicit and striking. Perhaps, according to the ideological logic of that period, it would be natural—or more desirable—to choose to commit to his work for the state. But he hesitates to make the choice. Kim's story ends at this moment of indecision. His difficulty with decision making and a confession of such a difficult situation insinuates that patriotic consciousness and rhetoric are never able to completely cover up the inner conflict and rupture brought about by death. It would be proper to say that the last part of this short story marks the limits of the state's domination and glorification of death.

After Liberation in 1945, the colonial Korean soldiers' voices and consciousness were constructed and presented on a large scale through various forms of media such as novels, memoirs, autobiographies, and films—what we can call the "culture of speaking the truth" when it comes to military mobilization. This trend continued for a long time, and representative narratives of those who were called up as student soldiers were published every so often.[18] In all of these cases, the main agents doing the speaking and writing were student soldiers. As mentioned before, they had strong principles and their experiences put them in advantageous positions to justify themselves not only as helpless victims of a vicious and blind imperialism but also as true symbols of the newly reborn Korean nation. The fact that they were forced into an imperialist war—and that they were mobilized for meaningless fighting without knowing why—gave them the self-confidence and courage to tell the stories of their experiences publicly. They have continuously written about the suffering they incurred during battles and military training and that of physical hardships, mental anguish, and their attempts to desert the army. Generally, the resentment and anger that they could not help but feel as the colonized underscore their essays. Their collective emotions can be explained

as being the result of the paradoxical and dislocated reality that compelled them to swear allegiance to another nation and to fight against ambiguous enemies in vain. Why and with whom should we fight the war? This was the fundamental question that the returning soldiers attempted to answer as they wrote their narratives. Besides a nationalistic resentment and anger, their deep love for their "true" homeland (Korea) and their long trial for the betterment of their country were often described.

The consciousness surrounding meaningless sacrifice and nationalistic passion was presented similarly in the realm of popular culture. Kim Naesŏng's famous novel *Ch'ŏngch'un kŭkchang* (Theatre of youth, 1953–54) and Han Unsa's trilogy *Aroun* (1961) are the representative works that narrated the story of the student soldier in the Colonial Period and made a tremendous impact on the postcolonial cultural market.[19] For a long period, these texts were continuously remade across such varied formats as novel, film, and radio drama.[20] Through these stories of Korean student soldiers deserting the Japanese military, we can see their adversities, spiritual sufferings, courage, sublime conscience, and their love for the nation of Korea. Following the typical mode and sensitivity of popular narratives, these are epic tales of nationalistic melodrama.[21] Through the postcolonial cultural rebirth of the stories of student soldiers, the deaths that happened under the order of the Japanese Empire returned to the heart of the motherland—a newly liberated Korea. This trajectory meant that the deaths of young Korean people became one of the most important resources for constructing and intensifying a new nationalism. The student soldiers, both their poignant victimhood and their sublime existence, ascended to the status of becoming the ultimate symbol that could simultaneously testify to both the national tragedy and Korea's strong will to revive itself.

INTERNAL CLEAVAGE BETWEEN THE STUDENT SOLDIERS IN THE DAYS OF THE COLD WAR

Upon Liberation, the deaths produced by imperial necropolitics regained a sense of honor based upon a newly constructed nationalism. However, it should be remembered that the nationalistic invocation of the death and life of student soldiers operated in the context of the Cold War. Therefore, the nationalist appropriation of the student soldiers' stories discussed above

shows just one aspect of a much more complex reality. Actually, not only South Korea's nationalism but also the Cold War shaped the student soldier narratives written after Liberation. The political situation of the Cold War brought about a new sense of sacrifice to the world of returned student soldiers. Here, I will discuss two cases in which the student soldiers were involved during the Cold War. Of course, the details and contexts of the two cases are not the same. Both clearly present the mode of dynamics in which Cold War politics worked and the changes it brought to the semantic and symbolic meanings of the student soldiers. It is through anticommunism that different images of student soldiers emerged. At this stage, the student soldiers stopped being just a pure icon of nationalism. If anything, they represented a signifier through which the rampant anticommunist fears and passions in South Korea were reflected. The Cold War and the torrent of anticommunism that it unleashed prevailed in the world of returned student soldiers.

The first case concerned a police raid on a student soldiers' organization in January of 1946. The policemen, commanded by Chang T'aeksang, the police commissioner at the time, raided the Hakpyŏng tongmaeng (Alliance of Student Soldiers). Three members of the organization were killed. Returned student soldiers formed various organizations after their repatriation. The Alliance of Student Soldiers was one of the representative political organizations of returned student soldiers, and it also published the magazine *Hakpyŏng* (Student soldier). Its manifesto included ousting imperialistic powers for the completion of national Liberation, becoming the driving force in building a new Korea, doing their best to lead a new cultural movement, cooperating to maintain public order, and endeavoring to build the Korean army of the future. It is not so surprising that such an alternative political organization became a target of attack for the Korean right-wing authorities under the US Army military government. They were obsessed with the eradication of power of the left-wing and radical political movements. Thus, the student soldiers were sacrificed by the ruling power in their homeland. The student soldiers then expressed their unbearable anger in *Hakpyŏng*. They labeled the attack and killing by the police force as "slaughter." The Alliance of Student Soldiers emphatically declared that "those who survived our foes, the Japanese, now fall into the hands of the fratricidal enemy!"[22] The three young people with "brave hearts for righteous life" were murdered "by cruel

Koreans (*chaninhan tongjok*)."[23] This was nothing but fratricide, which the student soldiers had never once imagined.[24] After this unprecedented event, the voice of condolences resonated throughout Korean society.

> Those student soldiers came back to their homeland one by one with the whirlwind of the August 15 Liberation. When we think of it, how surprised, proud, and delighted we were that the student soldiers returned alive. . . . How can we grieve enough over the deaths of three persons whose precious lives were taken right after returning from war? They could not have closed their eyes even if they had died on the battlefield. Then how could they die like that after returning to their homeland? . . . Who can deny that the current situation is no better than that of an occupied land?[25]

The student soldiers' death at the hands of the Korean police force was shocking to the people. Their deaths were seen very differently from the sacrifices made to Japanese imperialism. This time, the deaths were caused by the "vestiges of imperialism, political profiteers" and the "conservative fascist forces."[26] They became double victims. The first sacrifice was unjust, but the second was even more than unjust. They were betrayed by their own country. Due to state violence against leftist groups, new victims and their sacrifices were created, and new sacrificial narratives were told and circulated. The victims and their sacrifices were never honored by the state. On the contrary, they were not only killed but also excluded from the political community by the state itself. In the newly emerging anticommunist world, student soldiers were unable to ascend to the status of national icons for their glorious sacrifices if they did not completely obey the US military regime. Under the ideological and territorial division, the returned student soldiers' past hardships and torments could not be recognized unconditionally. The incident involving the Alliance of Student Soldiers brought to light an ideological sorting process to which those who were sacrificed by imperialism were subject. The sorting system mobilized violence, and those who had leftist political perspectives were unable to escape the roaring waves of anticommunism. They were treated as dangerous mobs, law breakers, and "terrorists" to be eradicated.[27]

However, this event and its historical meanings were not recorded or remembered in the South Korean literary media of the time, including mem-

oirs and novels. Previously, I mentioned that for a long time numerous stories were written by the student soldier generation about their experiences, and various cultural products borrowed themes from their stories. But these all tended to focus on the student soldiers' subjectivity as nationalists and patriots. When the sacrifices were depicted, they primarily blamed Japanese imperialism in an emphatic fashion for their sacrifices. Such a narrative code was broadly recognized and collectively accepted as a common heritage and thus could permeate popular memory and appeal to popular taste. Both consumers and suppliers of the narrative seemed to agree with one another. In the situation regarding continuous attacks on the left, progressive organizations were broken up, and people were forced to choose between South and North Korea depending on their political stances. The Bureau of Public Information decided to deregister certain parties or organizations "appearing in the name of freedom of association" and consequently some 133 societies were deregistered.[28] The increasing degree of physical violence and repression against leftist political powers in South Korea since Liberation suggests that those who had different political views were not permitted to stay or take root in the southern part of the peninsula. By examining this situation through the lens of the politics of memory, we can see that many familiar pieces of literature and film were already following the political and ideological logic of the South Korean state. Memory requires structural premises and a selection process, a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. Through the selective mechanism of memory, certain sacrifices were repeatedly chosen to be highlighted while others were left to be buried and forgotten during the Cold War.

By the end of the 1950s, a new form of student soldier narrative emerged. Even though the student soldiers' stories were steadily circulated, the subject matter was not seen as significant or impressive anymore. New socio-political experiences continuously registered in Korea's fast changing historical memory. In particular, the Korean War gave a strong sense of severance from the things of the past. It was a dominant and overwhelming source of collective recollection and memory in the writings and popular discourse of the 1950s. In post–Korean War South Korea, the identity of the student soldier in the imperial war seemed like a relic from an old past, which could not keep abreast of the people's contemporary interests or concerns. It was the narratives of the soldiers of the Korean War that took over the discursive field of representation in the 1950s. However, Sŏnu Hwi's 1957 novel "Pulkkot" (The

flame, 1957) about a student soldier emerged as a peculiar phenomenon during this period. Why did he call out the student of the old age of imperialism in the new era of the Cold War? What did he attribute to that soldier? And what sense of victimhood or sacrificial narrative was constructed?

Sŏnu is regarded as a writer of the post–Korean War generation. In general, the writers of the postwar generation were born between the years 1920–35 and typically began their writing careers around the time of the Korean War.[29] According to Han Suyŏng, who has researched the consciousness of this group, they experienced at least two wars, Japan's imperial war and the Korean War, but the former was seen as less significant. For them, the Korean War was the predominant issue to discuss. As a result, the memories of the colonial war were not often highlighted in their work. Han calls the writers' lack of attention to Japan's imperial war a type of "postcolonial amnesia," a concept borrowed from Leela Gandhi.[30] Han emphasized the effects of this oblivion. In erasing the preceding war from their memory, the postwar generation writers were able to avoid the difficult task of questioning the historical relationship and continuity between the two wars. However, Sŏnu attempted to link the two wars in his major work "Pulkkot," which focuses on the story of Ko Hyŏn, a returned student soldier. As Kim Yunsik argued in *Hanil hakpyŏng sedae ŭi pit kwa ŏdum* [The bright and dark sides of the Korean and Japanese student soldier generation], Sŏnu belonged to the student soldier generation, but did not have an actual experience of being a student soldier. It is because he was a student of Kyŏngsŏng sabŏm hakkyo (Kyŏngsŏng College of Education), the students of which could be exempted from conscription.[31]

Kim mentioned that Sŏnu's lack of actual experience as a student soldier resulted in a cursory and inaccurate description of the main character's desertion.[32] In "Pulkkot," Ko Hyŏn enlists in the Japanese army in Nagoya and serves in the transportation corps. There, he suffers harsh beatings and inhumane treatment that made him harbor "feelings of simmering hatred against others for no particular reason."[33] He was then sent to North China as a member of a detached unit and decides to desert the army as soon as he arrives in China. He thinks "beating, mistreatment, cruelty, arrogance, and servility were committed in the army. The army is never a place where a man can stay. I could endure it if there were any justification for it. But I have none. Why should I kill the Chinese?"[34] Then, he successfully escapes. It is

the lack of details and reality in depicting the escape that Kim criticized. Kim's comments are legitimate in that Sŏnu dealt with the escape scene cursorily. However, the detailed description or realistic restoration of the student soldier's life and escape was not his main concern. It was not Sŏnu's aim to recall the memories of the bitter colonized days and thus arouse nationalistic sentiment. What, then, was his primary intention in bringing to light the story of one runaway soldier in 1957?

"Pulkkot" is set in the period from the end of the Japanese colonial rule in Korea to 1950, depicting the landscape of the ideological division present in this turbulent time. Sŏnu attempts to show the accruing resentment that had gathered toward Marxism and Communism by positioning the returned student soldier in the middle of the intense political turmoil. The world of "Pulkkot" is filled with hatred and abhorrence of the left, and the author does not hesitate to display his antagonism toward Communism. The protagonist, Ko Hyŏn, acts as the eyes seeing through the evil desire of the left and as the mouth voicing their faults. Ko is a clear witness to the left's viciousness and violence. Sŏnu places his protagonist in a vast spatiotemporal setting so that he can present more evidence against the left. In other words, it is necessary for him to feature a runaway student soldier as the main character of the story. One night, Ko escapes from his unit and travels west to arrive at Yan'an, the main region of the Chinese Communist Eighth Army. There he meets an old communist by the name of Kim. Ko says,

> The old man Kim predicts that the people's liberation will come soon but, in fact, he is just waiting for a chance to satisfy his unjustifiably vengeful spirit. Communism is no better than the prophetic text of the *Chŏnggamnok* [Record of Chŏng's mirror]. If there is any difference, Communism is a prophetic text presented as a science. Kim takes Communism as a gold mine that will enable him in the future to make up for several times as much as what he lost in the first half of his life.[35]

Through his protagonist, Sŏnu argues that "you can call those who rigidly assign only one absolute meaning to the complex equation known as 'people's liberation.'"[36] According to his assertion, all leftists are nothing but "contractors without requestors." They simply fall into ingrained "narcissism" and are driven by "vanity." He harshly denounced the leftists when

arguing against one young communist's advocacy of sacrifice for the revolution. Here, Sŏnu clearly denies the sacrifice of revolutionaries and instead emphasizes the sacrifice of the people who were being exploited by leftists seeking only to pursue the fulfillment of their own desires. After Ko repatriates to Korea and arrives in his hometown, his antagonism toward Communism intensifies due to young leftists who demand that he join their political movement. Sŏnu depicts, in dramatic fashion, the young leftists' coercive power repressing Ko, who simply wants a quiet life. However, a great change occurs in Ko's consciousness when the people's court, implemented by leftists, violently persecuted their opponents. At last he decides to resist the leftists' cruelty and blindness. His revenge begins in the name of "life." He breaks out of his passivity and begins to raise his voice for the right to live and the courage it takes to preserve it.

By killing his communist friend Yŏnho, he declares that he will not be sacrificed anymore by the reckless revolutionaries and will not just sit back and watch the harm that they inflict. Ko's new moral is summarized as follows, "I will live. I will die only after I testify that I lived."[37] Sŏnu described this intense passion for life as a "flame." With the inner flame to eradicate the "contractors," his protagonist completely transforms into a warrior for a world in which he can live a peaceful life.

> What is certain is I will not look at or run away from this reality anymore. I will face up to it. I am trapped in a situation that does not allow me to flee. The moment of decision has finally come so close to me that I cannot help but to confront it. The days of the flower garden have all gone. First things first. I will survive in order to oppose the contractors. . . . I will oppose them, throwing my bare body headlong at them, rather than merely shun or laugh at them. There are countless people who are in the same plight as the one I'm in or in an even more miserable one.[38]

Thus, Sŏnu wrote about the newly transformed sacrificial narrative in the era of the Cold War, featuring the figure of the old student soldier who was piling up hatred against Communism in his body and mind. In "Pulkkot" sacrifice is mainly brought about by Communism. Of course, Sŏnu depicted the grim days of the Colonial Period, especially through Ko's experience in the Japanese army. He described Japanese imperialism and its war as an irre-

sistible vicious force pushing humans into servitude or death. According to Sŏnu's perspective, Communism following imperialism arrived as the second wave of brutal force that restricts human lives. Overall, it may seem that Sŏnu intended to denounce the chain of the historical torments, which Koreans helplessly went through, by showing the continuation of Ko's lamentable life. However, between the two enormous harms victimizing him again and again, his hostility is directed more at Communism. It is the communists he calls "contractors" whom he encounters in Yan'an, China, as well as in his hometown in Korea.

The moment of Ko's transformation comes when his sense of sacrifice changes into a desire for revenge. He sees unjustifiable sacrifices and ruthless persecutions at the site of the people's court, which only intends to "plant the seeds of fear and hatred in the heart of the people" by "butchering the live scapegoat and smearing their hands with human blood."[39] Thus, as a way of confronting Communism, the anticommunist sacrificial narrative and the revenge narrative were simultaneously constructed. Ko, the returned student soldier, is the symbol of an anticommunist fighter rather than just the nationalist icon that provokes nostalgia. Sŏnu was a typical anticommunist nationalistic writer who represented the ideological tendency of the literary establishment of the 1950s. In 1954, just one year after the signing of the Korean War Armistice Agreement, he published *Kwihwan* (Returning home), which contains many stories of soldiers who fought in the war. In the last part of this work, Sŏnu wrote that "it is irrefutable that today's biggest challenge facing humanity is how to overcome Communism. I believe humans have the ability to resolve this problem."[40] And in *Kippal ŏmnun kisu* (Flag bearer with no flag), another novel published in 1959, he described a young man who exposes and fights the duplicity, corruption, and deceitfulness of the left. This young man, in that sense, is another Ko. "Pulkkot" lies between these two works and shares the same view of the world. It is not accidental that the old student soldier, who put on the clothes of the 1950s, appeared as the incarnation of the contemporary anticommunist warrior. Ko was a real hero of both the sacrificial story and the revenge story during the Cold War.

RETHINKING SACRIFICE AND THE SACRIFICIAL NARRATIVE

Modern Korean history suggests that sacrifice, or the sense of sacrifice, is a political problem. Imperialism, national division, ideological conflicts, and the war have brought about numerous deaths, incurable scars, and indelible traumas. Through such devastation, the state has acted as the agent of ranking and grading the value of victims, designating some deaths as valuable to the state and others as not. The Japanese colonial empire and the newly established South Korean state actually did the same things while using the same principles. More than a few intellectuals actively participated in the process of this valuation system. They created stories of sacrifice and delivered them in ways that would be amenable to the state ideology. Nationalism, patriotism, and anticommunism were the decisive frameworks through which certain deaths were elevated as invaluable sacrifices or rediscovered as such. The process of ideological manipulation carried out by those with sufficient cultural capital to speak and write in public used techniques such as memory/amnesia, concealment/exposure, and exaggeration/reduction.

Among the groups that had both the ability and the intention to manipulate the masses with the idea of sacrifice were the student soldiers. They were not only victims but also narrators who were able to speak about their sacrifices. The content and form of their narratives have changed according to the given cultural and political contexts. Therefore, it is important to examine the parts of their stories that disappeared from the public sphere. We can recover the erased scene in which the student soldiers spoke out against the wrongful deaths of their comrades at the hands of their own government, only when trying to excavate it from their collective oblivion, a grave where their memory of such deaths was buried. These student soldiers resisted the cruel, unjustified, and immoral state. However, this history became invisible since South Korean ideology is painted only with the monochromatic colors of nationalism and anticommunism. By examining this erased past, we can see the unevenness of many sacrifices. In order to approach the forgotten or denied deaths by the state and the excessive meaning of the deaths that transcended the boundaries of the normative national imagination, we should examine this unevenness more closely, just as we should continue questioning the legitimacy of the impetus and the resources that produced such unevenness. The student soldiers themselves, both those who died on the imperial battle-

field and those who came back alive, can be viewed as conjunctions in which the desire, imagination, and mentality of the state and individuals intersect to produce the meaning of these soldiers' sacrifices. Therefore, we should endeavor to construct the genealogy of returned student soldiers' self-representations for the analysis of the cultural politics of sacrifice, the sacrificial narrative, and their ideological dynamics. The work of drawing up this genealogy leads us to another important question about the legal management of the deaths and sacrifices that took place during the Colonial Period. To answer this question, we need to look at the process and the conclusion of the Republic of Korea–Japan talks and the diplomatic normalization between the two countries.

It is well known that the Park Chung Hee administration (1961–79) during the 1960s needed resources for economic development in order to maintain its state system and to justify its power. Essentially, the government depended on the normalization of diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan. As a result, the aim and nature of South Korea's negotiation with Japan for the establishment of diplomatic relations were dictated by the Park administration's desperate need for it. At that time, the South Korean government did not carefully consider and duly weigh issues concerning the right of individuals who were forcibly mobilized and conscripted for Japan's war effort during the Colonial Period. As a result, the 1965 agreement sidestepped the problem of the individual rights of South Korean nationals.[41] In that sense, the normalization of the diplomatic relationship between South Korea and Japan presupposed the two governments' mutual understanding that the issues of Japan's colonialization of Korea and the sacrifices caused by its violence would not be raised by the South Korean government in the future. The Park Chung Hee administration agreed to no longer mention the past on the basis of its economic and political calculations. This agreement ensured that the sacrifices that occurred during the Colonial Period would not be properly recognized at the legal or official level. The student soldiers' voices about their sacrifices, anger, passion, courage, and devotion to their homeland became fundamentally nullified by the logic, principle, and strategy of the South Korean state. Their sacrifices have been ceaselessly wandering the labyrinth of history and are still waiting for an instance of proper mourning.

NOTES

1. Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque*.

2. Ibid, 14.

3. Takahashi Tetsuya, *Kukka wa hŭisaeng* [The nation and sacrifice], 111.

4. On the issue of repatriation see Kim Yerim, *Paeban ŭrosŏŭi kukka, nanmin ŭrosŏŭi inmin* [The state's betrayal or people as refugees]; and Hwang Pyŏngju, "Migunjŏnggi chŏnjaemin kuho undong kwa minjok tamnon" [The refugee relief campaign and the "national discourse" during the US Military Government in Korea].

5. Musimch'ŏnin, "Chŏnjaemin" [War victims].

6. Yi Kwangsu, "Tongp'o ege ponaenda [Send to compatriot], 166.

7. *Chiwŏnja ŭi puhyŏng ege* [The volunteer's father and elder brothers], 147.

8. Higuchi Yūichi, *Senjika Chōsen no minshū to chōhei* [Conscription and Korea's masses during wartime], 162.

9. Ibid., 161.

10. For an in-depth analysis of this film, see Paek Munim, "Kunin i toeseyo" [Become a soldier].

11. In comparison with Korean student soldiers during the Colonial Period, before going to war Japanese student soldiers left various existential confessions and intellectual inquires about death and war. On the consciousness of Japanese student soldiers serving as Kamikaze tokkōtai, see Ōnuki Emiko [Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney], *Chugŭramyŏn chugŭrira* [If ordered to die, I will die].

12. Iwamoto Masao, "Yonggamhi sun'guk ŭi kil ro" [Go in, brave the way of death for the country], 54.

13. Kim Sŏngsu, "Taeŭi e chugŭl ttae" [The time to die for a great cause], 21. For details on Kim Sŏngsu's ideology at the end of the Colonial Period, see Chang Sin, "Ilche malgi Kim Sŏngsu ŭi ch'inil haengjŏk kwa pyŏnhoron pip'an" [The criticism about defense theory and pro-Japanese work of Kim Sŏngsu at the end of the Japanese Empire].

14. "Chŏnmol yŏngnyŏng ŭl choham" [Pay respects to the fallen spirits].

15. Kim Yongje, "Sōtei" [The strong young man], 313.

16. Ibid., 315.

17. Ibid., 318.

18. See for example, Yun Chaehyŏn, *Sasŏn ŭl hemaemyŏ* [Wandering the death line]; Ch'oe Chŏngsik and Kim Ihyŏn, *Hakpyŏng t'alch'ulgi* [The story of a student soldier's escape]; Chang Chunha, *Tolbegae* [The stone pillow]; 1.20 Tongjihoe, *Ch'ŏngch'un manjang* [Elegy for the youth]; Yu Chaeyŏng, *Ch'irin ŭi t'alch'ul* [The escape of seven people]; and Kim Munt'aek, *T'alch'ulgi* [The story of escape].

19. The trilogy of *Aroun* by Han Unsa is composed of *Hyŏnhaet'an ŭn algo itta* [The Genkai Sea knows]; *Hyŏnhaet'an ŭn mal i ŏpta* [The Genkai Sea is silent]; and *Sŭngja wa p'aeja* [The winner and the loser].

20. Kim Naesŏng's *Ch'ŏngch'un kŭkchang* [Theatre of youth] was remade as a film in 1959, 1967, and 1975.

21. In particular, Han Unsa's work marked the beginning of a new trend in South Korean culture that emerged before and after the diplomatic normalization between South Korea and Japan in 1965. Especially, some films took the leading role in advertising the historical significance of the change in the South Korea–Japan relationship. Such films often depicted the love between a Korean man and a Japanese woman and thus ultimately praised the national spirit of the brave Korean young man. These motives intended to symbolize the rearrangement of the two countries' position by utilizing extremely popular melodrama genres. On this issue see Kim Yerim, "Puranjŏn kukka ŭi munhwa chŏngch'i wa postcolonial munhwa sangp'um ŭi chang" [Cultural politics of insecure state and postcolonial cultural products contextualizing the Genkai Sea in the films of the 1960s].

22. "Chosa" [eulogy], 2.

23. Ibid., 2.

24. Yi Hyeryŏng pays attention to the Alliance of Student Soldiers and this incident in her superb research, "Haebang: Ch'ong tŭn ch'ŏngnyŏn ŭi nanaldŭl" [Liberation: Days of young men holding guns]. It analyzes the problem of fratricide and the monopoly of violence by the state and focuses on the phenomenon of Korean young men holding guns.

25. Yi Wŏnjo, "T'ongdo ch'amsal hakpyŏng" [The memory of murdered student soldiers], 28.

26. "Chibang eso toraon hakpyŏng tamhwa" [The statement of student soldiers returned from locals], 10.

27. Ibid., 9. The term "terrorist" was used in the statement by Cho Pyŏngok, the director of police affairs for the US Army Military Government in Korea.

28. Editorial, *Sŏul sinmun*, October 19, 1949.

29. Han Suyŏng, "Kwanjŏnsa ŭi kwanchŏm ŭro pon Han'guk chŏnjaeng kiŏk ŭi tu kaji hyŏngsik" [A study on the two forms of Korean War memory through the view point of transwar history]

30. Han Suyŏng, "Kwanjŏnsa ŭi kwanchŏm ŭro pon Han'guk chŏnjaeng kiŏk ŭi tu kaji hyŏngsik," 432–33. Leela Gandhi coined this term in Lilla Kandi [Leela Gandhi], *P'osŭt'ŭsingminjuŭi ran muŏt in'ga* [Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction], translated by Yi Yŏnguk, 16.

31. Kim Yunsik, *Hanil hakpyŏng sedae ŭi pit kwa ŏdum* [The bright and dark sides of Korean and Japanese student soldier generation]. On the ideological inclinations of this generation see Kim Kŏnu, "Wŏllam hakpyŏng sedae ŭi haebang hu 8-yŏn" [The student soldier generation who came from North Korea eight years after Liberation].

32. Kim Yunsik, *Hanil hakpyŏng sedae ŭi pit kwa ŏdum*, 41.

33. Sŏnu Hwi, "Pulkkot" [The flame], 337.
34. Ibid., 337.
35. Ibid., 339.
36. Ibid., 339.
37. Ibid., 360.
38. Ibid., 361.
39. Ibid.
40. Sŏnu Hwi, *Kwihwan* [Returning home], 240.
41. In 1965, the South Korean government took the position that the rights of individuals should be extinguished. Therefore, based on this premise, the Republic of Korea only paid compensation to the bereaved of the dead who were conscripted (300,000 wŏn/person). The individual rights and compensation of the forcibly mobilized people have been continuously reinterpreted and re-problematized until now, due to the South Korean government's responsibility, lack of historical awareness, and interest-orientated judgement at the time of the talks—as well as to Japan's long-lasting strategy to avoid responsibility for colonial rule. To read more about this issue see Kim Ch'angnok, "1965-yŏn Hanil choyak kwa Han'gugin kaein ŭi kwŏlli" [The 1965 agreement between Korea and Japan and the individual rights of Korean nationals against Japan]. For the context and contents of the talks between South Korean and Japan and the movement against the talks and the agreement see Chŏng Ilchun, "Han'guk chisigin ŭi taeil insik kwa Hanil hoedam" [Korean intellectual's perception of Japan and reaction toward the Korea-Japan normalization treaty negotiation].

PART III

Democracy and Labor Activism in South Korea

7

Reading Chun Tae-il: Making Sense of a Worker Self- Immolation in 1970s South Korea

HWASOOK NAM

On February 16, 2015, a forty-five-year-old veteran worker and union representative of the Kŭmho Tire factory in Koksŏng, South Chŏlla Province, immolated himself in protest of the company's decision to turn regular unionized jobs into subcontract (*togŭp*) work.[1] The death of Kim Chaegi followed a long series of worker suicide-protests by self-immolation in South Korean labor history, which, according to one set of statistics, saw forty-four such cases between 1970 and March of 2005.[2] The tragic history of self-immolation deaths of workers began in 1970, when garment worker Chun Tae-il (Chŏn T'aeil; 1949–70) ended his life by burning a labor law book together with his body in a busy downtown commercial district of Seoul. While self-immolation also occurred during this time within the student movement, it disappeared after 1997. But labor activists have yet to abandon this gruesome method of struggle, despite increasingly vigorous pleas from within and outside the labor movement against it. Close to half a century has passed since Chun Tae-il's death, but the Chun Tae-il story, a story of a young man with a big heart who turned himself into a "human flame" to help fellow workers and to awaken the society, still resonates powerfully among labor activists and progressive communities in South Korea today.

The historical importance of Chun Tae-il's suicide by self-immolation as a turning point in South Korean social movements has been well established in both academic and activist literature.[3] South Korean poet Ko Ŭn sings,

> Chun Tae-il/ With his death a new era opened
>
> A life longer than any life/ An era of death longer than any death.[4]

Unlike many other suicides in that period, Chun's action sparked an unusual and unprecedented swell of responses as the media picked up the story and the opposition movement, especially university student activists and the progressive Christian community, responded swiftly. Chun's death has been acknowledged widely among both activists and scholars in South Korea as *the* spark that ignited a new militant and democratic labor movement and the worker-intellectual alliance that buttressed it, thus beginning the process of the "discovery of the *minjung* (common people)" by the intellectual elite.[5] Historian Namhee Lee, in her excellent monograph analyzing the development and the politics of the *minjung* movement, sums up eloquently the tremendous impact Chun's death had in shaping the 1970s dissident movement as follows:

> If Che Guevara stirred the souls of middle-class European and American college students in the 1960s, Chŏn T'ae-il and his death stirred the souls of thousands of Korean students and workers, eventually pushing them into the streets and factories. If the Gwangju [Kwangju] Uprising [of 1980] became the cross to bear for 1980s activists, then Chŏn T'ae-il's death was the cross for 1970s activists.[6]

The impact of Chun Tae-il's shocking action was so big in part because it occurred at the precise moment when the relationship between the dissident movement and the Park Chung Hee (Pak Chŏnghŭi, 1961–79) administration was changing rapidly. It occurred at the dawn of the *Yusin* (revitalization) authoritarian turn that transformed the regime into full-blown authoritarianism during the 1970s. For the emerging democracy movement of the time, which began to criticize the developmental economic policies of the increasingly authoritarian regime, Chun's death sparked and accelerated the process of reconceptualizing the non-elite population as a subject of history-making. This process of defining and discovering the people as potential allies of the epic battle against the authoritarian regime had been going on in certain sectors of the intellectual community during the 1960s.[7] But the impact of Chun's self-immolation was profound. Many prominent dissident intellectuals, including poet Ko Ŭn, Quaker thinker Ham Sŏkhŏn, and *minjung* theologian An Pyŏngmu, recalled the shock they had experienced upon learning about Chun's self-immolation and remembered it as a transformative moment

in their thinking.[8] Many worker activists recall the transformative experience they had upon discovering Chun Tae-il through reading his biography.[9] And the particular way Chun's suicide-protest was embraced and understood in the 1970s, compounded by the impact of the Kwangju Massacre of 1980, influenced the emergence of a powerful moral discourse of martyrdom, especially by self-immolation, over the 1980s and 1990s.[10]

The narrative of Chun Tae-il's life and death that became authoritative by the mid-1980s was one laid out in *Chŏn T'aeil P'yŏngjŏn* (A critical biography of Chun Tae-il), written in the mid-1970s by student-activist-turned-human-rights-lawyer Cho Yŏngnae; 1948–91) and first published in 1983. This chapter examines the historical context within which this powerful biography was born, and, by analyzing Cho Yŏngnae's interpretation side by side with the substantial body of written work that Chun Tae-il himself left behind, attempts an alternative reading of aspects of the young worker's world. Reading Chun's writings in their 1960s setting and analyzing Cho Yŏngnae's critical biography of Chun in its own 1970s historical context, I seek to illuminate the distance between Chun's subjectivity as a lower-class young male worker and Cho's sensibility as an elite law student and democracy activist. By doing so I hope to shed light on what might have been erased in the process of Cho's reading of Chun Tae-il and why that matters. Looking anew into the circumstances of Chun's life and death may offer insights into the phenomenon of labor martyrdom through self-immolation in South Korea and the unusual staying power of martyrdom discourse in the labor movement. It might also allow us to see the nature and limitations of the notion of the *minjung* that emerged through the intensive interpretive and memory work on Chun Tae-il's life and death over the 1970s and 1980s.

CHUN TAE-IL'S DIARY AND CHO YŎNGNAE'S BIOGRAPHY

Chun Tae-il left a collection of writings, including a diary, letters, autobiographical accounts, and even outlines for novels through which we can look into his thinking process and imagine what drove him into his fateful decision during the last months of his life.[11] Chun received only a few years of formal education, but his writings show a sharp and probing mind. His diary entries and narration of his own life experiences allow us to visualize a struggling lower-class young man besieged by poverty and frustrated by social

injustice, yet persistent in the effort to find a way to change the situation on behalf of the people around him. As Chun became more convinced of his subject position and what needed to be done, he tried to write fictional accounts in which he followed the life events and agony of a young male protagonist like himself. It seems he wanted to see what would happen if his vision were allowed to run its course to the end. Although left incomplete, this effort at storytelling by Chun bequeathed to us significant traces of his inner world.

One wonders if Chun intended his diary to be read. One of the three novel plots he experimented with contains a clue to his conflicted feelings regarding public viewing of his diary.[12] In a draft plan for this fictional work he penned in early 1970 a young man is driven to contemplate suicide out of despair and ends up being wrongfully convicted of murdering his former employer. Against his brother's wishes, however, the protagonist refuses to use his diary as evidence of his innocence, to the point of even denying its authenticity. "He would rather accept a death sentence than allow his diary, in which he had copied his own past, to go public," Chun writes. When the protagonist finally relents and assents to the pleading of his brother, and the diary is introduced to the court, Chun continues, "[a] silent and heavy quietude besets the courtroom audience. The audience eventually cries out. The chief judge also feels a burst of heat in his heart, and the prosecutor and the judges feel the same."[13] This particular novel plot points to the possibility that Chun Tae-il consciously left behind his diary in the expectation that its readers—family and friends, and even strangers—would have, through his own words, a better understanding of why he acted as he did, and, hopefully, be motivated to act upon his wishes. His diary, it seems, was a part of his final plan, together with self-immolation, to make his communication as clear and impactful as possible. What he could not have foreseen, however, was the scale of responses from elite intellectuals, who would interpret Chun's words and actions in ways consistent with their own preoccupations and assumptions.

Upon encountering the news of a worker's public suicide in Seoul's Peace Market, various knowledge producers, including media reporters, student activists, dissident intellectuals, and politicians, sought to find an appropriate frame of understanding for the young worker's gruesome suicide.[14] This interpretive work culminated in the production of the authoritative biography

of Chun Tae-il in the mid-1970s by Cho Yŏngnae. This biographical account was first published in Korea in 1983 and was widely circulated among activists and workers despite the government's immediate banning of the book.[15] The book came to be regarded as the bible or primer for activist training in the *minjung* movement throughout the 1980s and 1990s.[16] Before Cho's completion of the biography, workers and labor activists accessed Chun Tae-il's life and thoughts through Xerox copies of Chun's writings. While Cho was on the run—he was implicated in the Minch'ŏng Hangnyŏn (the National Federation of Democratic Youth and Students or NFDYS; Chŏn'guk Minju Ch'ŏngnyŏn Haksaeng Yŏnmaeng) Incident of 1974—he immersed himself in the world of Chun Tae-il through careful reading of Chun's writings and interviews with Chun's mother and worker friends.[17] The result was a beautifully written and deeply moving biography, with a philosophical exposition of what the author dubbed "Chun Tae-il Thought (*sasang*)" at the center. The empathy, respect, and love readers sensed in Cho's narration of Chun's life and death helped sear in the minds of generations of activists a vivid, beautiful image of a courageous young worker with a big heart. The authentic voice of Chun Tae-il seemed to vouch for the truthfulness of the biography as Cho extensively quoted from Chun's writings. Numerous works on Chun's life since then, including the feature film released with the English title, *A Single Spark*, directed by Pak Kwangsu in 1995 (the original Korean title is *Arŭmdaun ch'ŏngnyŏn Chŏn T'aeil* [A beautiful youth Chun Tae-il]), largely follow the parameters laid out by Cho Yŏngnae in his moving biography.[18]

In the space of this critical biography, the minds of Chun Tae-il and Cho Yŏngnae seem to have met and a timeless classic in activist literature was born. Yet the two young men were products of very different socioeconomic and political circumstances. Moreover, South Korean society and the dissident movement were being transformed between the time of Chun's immolation in 1970 and the time of Cho's writing a half decade later. During those crucial years, as noted above, the Park Chung Hee regime moved into a full-blown authoritarian phase under the Yusin Constitution of 1972. The Yusin era was qualitatively different from the Park regime of the 1960s, a time when, as the Methodist minister and labor activist of the Incheon Urban Industrial Mission, George Ogle, argued in an influential book on the South Korean labor movement, the government was still "flirting with democracy."[19] While Chun's vision was shaped by his working-class experiences in the 1960s,

Cho's perspective—as an elite intellectual—was forged in the emergent democracy movement of the 1970s, which faced harsh suppression from the Park regime. In Cho's time a crucial task for dissident intellectuals was developing a critique of the regime's developmental dictatorship and its growth-first ideology. As it became clear that intellectuals alone would not be able to unseat the authoritarian regime, the effort increasingly centered on the figure of the suffering *minjung* and their political potential as a subject of history. Chun Tae-il's suicide-protest was destined to be framed and explained in the new *minjung* movement discourse of the 1970s and 1980s, and Cho provided the critical intellectual input to that end.

CHUN TAE-IL: A CHRISTIAN YOUTH AND LABOR ORGANIZER

Narratives of Chun's suicide evolved over the 1970s and 1980s, and by the 1990s the discourse of labor martyr (*nodong yŏlsa*) Chun, who became the flame that ignited a wild fire of *minjung* activism, had become part of the foundation myth of the democracy movement in South Korea. Among various meaning-making efforts in the aftermath of Chun's suicide three major approaches are discernable. The first and most immediate articulation came from Christian intellectuals and university students. This progressive Christian narrative posited Chun as a "little Jesus" figure who sacrificed himself for the sake of all the people. The "Eulogy" in the name of the Student Associations of Universities in Seoul, dated November 20, 1970, and an article by O Chaesik, the General Secretary of the Korea Students Christian Federation (KSCF), in the December 1970 issue of *Kidokkyo sasang* (Christian thought), titled "Ŏttŏn Yesu ŭi chugŭm" (The death of a Jesus), were early instances of this Christian reading.[20] O's article ignited a firestorm of controversy among Christians as conservative Protestant leaders were flabbergasted by the idea of associating Jesus's name with Chun Tae-il, who, in their view, had sinned by committing suicide.[21]

In the progressive Christian imagination, the meaning of the death of Chun Tae-il was not narrowly defined as a matter of labor exploitation but was understood as a wake-up call for the whole society to conduct self-reflection and repentance. Chun Tae-il and his mother were both devout Protestant Christians, and both Chun's diary and interviews and memoirs of his mother Yi Sosŏn amply testify to the fact that Christian faith was indeed an integral

part of Chun's worldview and possibly of his decision to end his life too.[22] Christian activists in 1970 reacted to an unfathomable act of self-sacrifice by a young worker by holding many prayer meetings, producing statements, and joining demonstrations, all against the wishes of conservative mainstream church leaders. This Christian reading of Chun's sacrificial action had a significant impact on the emergent *minjung* theology of the era.[23]

Interestingly, the Christian explanation is muted in Cho Yŏngnae's version of the story. Cho's telling exemplifies a second, humanist, approach to the Chun Tae-il story.[24] Cho presents Chun Tae-il as a person of compassion and keen intellect who, by grappling with the many problems he was witnessing in society, achieved a profound level of understanding about the human condition under the existing socioeconomic system. Chun's inner struggle that led him to the very difficult decision to sacrifice his own life for others is told in Cho's biography without engaging Chun's Christian faith, although the deathbed scene at the hospital is replete with Christian imagery of martyrdom if one chooses to read it that way.[25] Cho Yŏngnae's own biographer, An Kyŏnghwan, argues that this humanistic interpretation differentiates Cho's understanding of Chun Tae-il from that of Chang Kip'yo. Chang Kip'yo, an activist at the College of Law at Seoul National University, was one of the first intellectuals who upon hearing the news of Chun's self-immolation rushed to the hospital where Chun's body lay and talked with Chun's mother.[26] He became a key intellectual ally of Peace Market garment workers, who organized the Cheonggye (Ch'ŏnggye) Garment Workers' Union in the wake of Chun's suicide, and he played a crucial role as the link between the dissident movement and the *minju* (democratic) union movement of the Cheonggye Garment Workers' Union. The union emerged as one of the most militant labor organizations of the 1970s and showcased the intense intervention of intellectuals in union affairs based on the strategy of the *nohak yŏndae* (worker-student alliance). Chang saw Chun as a Jesus-like figure, to whom the biographer Cho was Saint Paul.[27] In contrast, Cho Yŏngnae discovered in Chun Tae-il a worker intellectual, not a saint, and admired the spirit of love and solidarity toward humanity Chun had exhibited. Cho's deep empathy and identification with Chun as a fellow human being trying to do good in society permeate the pages of the biography, making the story a universal human story that can speak to a wider audience beyond the progressive Christian community.

The third strain of interpretation is embodied in the recollection of Chun's mother Yi Sosŏn. Her version centers around the pioneering role Chun played for the South Korean labor movement. Yi Sosŏn's method of highlighting the importance of her son's action was to emphasize a particular private conversation she had with him. Chun allegedly told her that if he helped puncture a needle hole in the suffocating darkness they were in, then people would be encouraged to try to enlarge that hole to bring light into society. In her memoir, interviews, and also in the feature film *Arŭmdaun ch'ŏngnyŏn Chŏn T'aeil* (A single spark) Yi repeated the needle-hole story. It seems to have been her way of coming to terms with the unbearable loss of her beloved son. As Chun had wished on his deathbed, Yi picked up from where Chun left off and continued the fight in the labor and the democracy movements as "the mother of all workers" until she passed away in 2011.[28] Workers who reminisce about reading Xerox copies of Chun Tae-il's writings or his biography also tend to find inspiration and motivation to act from Chun's spirit of love and solidarity toward fellow workers. Chun Tae-il is their hero and role model, a worker leader whom they could be proud of and learn from. This last strain of interpretation is clearly a class-based story. This workers' reading corresponds to what scholar Sin Pyŏnghyŏn sees as a "unique political subjectivity" emerging in worker essays (*sugi*) published in the late 1970s, which pivoted on "thoughts on sincerity, humanism, sacrifice, pride, egalitarianism, and hope."[29] The reading resonates with Cho Yŏngnae's humanism-centered narrative, while emphasizing Chun's position as a worker and worker-to-worker communication and connections. Let us now examine Chun Tae-il's writings in more detail and see how Christian and worker-centric perspectives might alter and enrich Cho's humanist philosophical framework.

In rethinking Chun Tae-il's subjectivity and vision through his words and actions, I believe, we need to pay particular attention to Chun Tae-il as a Christian youth (*kidok ch'ŏngnyŏn*), and as a male labor organizer, aspects that Cho's biography does not illuminate fully. Chun's own writings reveal that his frame of thinking was deeply influenced by his Christian faith. The Christian reading of his death sees in his sacrifice a little Jesus figure and highlights his noble act of martyrdom for the sake of the people.[30] But what is most surprising and moving in Chun's action is the fact that he chose to die for fellow workers, especially young female *sida* (apprentice) workers. Chun oftentimes used a specific term, "childlike innocence" (*tongsim*), when talking about his

beloved worker-sisters, and his indignation and frustration toward the callousness of society and government authorities stemmed in particular from the extreme exploitation he witnessed regarding these *sida* workers. Why, we should ask, did a male garment cutter (*chaedansa*), who was at the top of the workplace hierarchy just below the employer, choose to fight for the lowest of the female workers? The little Jesus moniker given to him by Christian leaders after his death was more metaphorical than theological, but it is possible that Chun himself saw himself in the shoes of Jesus and wanted to do God's work for the most downtrodden *sida* workers.

Chun Tae-il's Christian love and religious sense of mission was, I believe, intertwined with his search for social recognition of his manhood. What is impossible to miss in his writings is a strong demand for the recognition of the human dignity of working-class people like him. He describes in his diary many experiences he had of class-based discrimination and humiliating treatment, which angered him deeply and made him painfully aware of his status as a lower-class man. His love toward young female *sida* workers and his posture as the male protector of them, as an elder brother figure, can be read as an expression of his masculine subjectivity as a working-class young man who aspired to be a dignified, respectable, full-fledged member of society.

Chun's growing self-identification as a worker activist, I believe, also deserves more attention. As Cho Yŏngnae's most philosophical chapter in the biography, titled "Chŏn T'aeil sasang" (Chun Tae-il thought), effectively portrays, Chun contemplated the nature of capitalist relations of production deeply, albeit without the help of social science knowledge. Chun called the economic practices of the day "the economic ideas of the establishment" (*kisŏng sedae ŭi kyŏngje kwannyŏm*) and drafted a novel around April of 1970 about a youth who struggles desperately against them.[31] For years Chun persisted in his effort to find an answer to the alienation and exploitation of production workers that he witnessed in his workplaces and succinctly summarizes the fundamental demands of workers as "bread, time, and freedom."[32] For him these basic necessities of dignified human life were the substance of democracy and citizenship. In Chun Tae-il's thinking the desirable form of a capitalist economic system and social relations took a particular shape in which the Labor Standards Act played a special part.

THE MEANING OF THE LABOR STANDARDS ACT

Cho's biography downplays Chun's trust in South Korea's labor laws, especially the Labor Standards Act. And it neglects Chun's and his friends' persistent efforts to make the real conditions of labor known to the media and to government offices in the hope of getting the national labor laws enforced. Likewise dismissed without much analysis in Cho's biography is Chun's dream of founding a model company that abides by the Labor Standards Act. For Chun this was a way of enlightening society about the possibility of a humane form of capitalist development. But for Cho Yŏngnae and other intellectuals of his time Chun's plans to appeal to the conscience of the society and the government were signs of workers' immature consciousness or naivety.[33] The spirit and provisions of the labor laws, however, seem to have resonated with quite different meanings and symbolism for Chun and his friends.

Chun's mother, Yi Sosŏn, had little doubt about the impact of the Labor Standards Act on her son's consciousness. She later recalled how she had felt threatened by "that darn book" (*kŭ nom ŭi ch'aek*). She felt that "the book," *(Ch'ukcho) kŭllo kijunpŏp haesŏl* (An [article-by-article] guide to the Labor Standards Act) written by Sim T'aesik, "will cause problems" (*il nael ch'aek*) and just looking at the title of it filled her with "a sense of foreboding."[34] The mother understood the power of the labor law book over her son, and even seeing it "made [her] feel crawly" (*pogiman haedo chinggŭrŏun ch'aek*).[35] In an extremely revealing statement Im Chŏngsam, the Labor Standards Section chief at the Office of Labor Affairs, who was dismissed upon Chun's suicide, said in his own defense that he was concerned about workers reading labor law books by themselves, because that might produce a "consciousness-raising effect" (*ŭisikhwa*).[36] To a degree Cho Yŏngnae also acknowledges the importance of the Act to Chun's development. At one point he states, "the discovery of the Labor Standards Act was indeed one of the most significant incidents that changed his fate."[37] Cho and other intellectual activists understood that the knowledge of the Labor Standards Act allowed workers to realize that they had certain rights that the nation's laws guaranteed and the exploitation they experienced at the workplace was illegal and unjust. But in the narrative of the Labor Standards Act in Cho's biography and in other activist accounts, the emphasis was on the fact that the law was violated with

impunity by South Korean companies, which for these intellectuals served to prove the hypocrisy and illegitimacy of the Park government.

For workers like Chun, however, the law's meaning seems to have been much more profound. As I argued in my book on South Korean shipbuilding workers, the labor laws of South Korea, promulgated in 1953, reflected long-standing aspirations and achievements of the Korean labor movement over several decades before their passage, and they were no small democratic accomplishment.[38] Chun Tae-il encountered the Labor Standards Act in 1967, thanks to his father, who had participated in the leftist Chŏnp'yŏng labor movement that surged in the immediate post-Liberation years before it was suppressed by the US occupation government and right-wing Korean forces. For Chun, it was an unbelievable find, a document that informed him that the nation's law recognized workers' rights to "bread, time, and freedom," and that "the economic ideas of the establishment" were not right.[39] When he learned of the existence of the law, Chun named his organization the Pabohoe (Fools' society), fools who did not even know that they had righteous claims to make. For workers like Chun, the Labor Standards Act signified their citizenship rights, their claim to human dignity, and their right to be treated equally. South Korean workers have been persistently making these demands for the past several decades, using the ubiquitous phrase in labor statements and literature, the "right to live like human beings."[40]

The prominence of the Labor Standards Act in Chun Tae-il's story, including his act of burning the copy of the *Guide to the Labor Standards Act* that he had cherished for so long, together with himself, suggests to me that we need to more seriously consider the meaning of this law from the workers' perspective. Through the Labor Standards Act, introduced to him by his father, Chun Tae-il was, in effect, linked with the legacies of the colonial and postcolonial labor movement and the struggle for nation-building in general. These legacies bequeathed a particular vision of a moral and socioeconomic order for a postcolonial Korea. This ideal moral order was enshrined in the nation's founding Constitution, as we can see from its progressive economic clauses, including the "right of workers to share in business profits" (*iik kyunjŏmkwŏn*) and the constitutional guarantee of labor rights.[41] A national consensus on the contours of that order was also revealed in the National Assembly discussion of the labor laws in 1953.[42] The Park Chung Hee regime in the 1960s abided by the labor laws to a greater degree than conventionally

acknowledged and did not dismantle the basic framework of the 1953 labor laws even during the Yusin period.[43] During the 1960s, when Chun grew to become a labor activist, the democratic and egalitarian ideals of the anticolonial struggle and the surging radicalism of the immediate postwar period still had a lingering effect on how people imagined a desirable form of society and economy. It was only in the Yusin period of the 1970s that the "growth-first" ideology of the Park regime became hegemonic in society, a transformation that was the result of intense ideological campaigns, repression of labor, and social engineering, backed up by rapid economic growth itself.[44] Chun Tae-il's fixation on the promise of South Korean labor laws, I believe, was a reflection of popular perceptions of the underlying democratic promise of South Korea's system, rather than a result of ignorance and naivety among workers lacking education and proper political consciousness, as Cho Yŏngnae and other intellectuals implied.[45]

For Chun, his friends, and many other worker activists in the following decades for that matter, the symbolism of the Labor Standards Act went far beyond the intellectual activists' argument that it was merely "a piece of paper" that hid the real nature of the system.[46] To the contrary, the document could and did invoke, among workers who encountered it, an alternative vision of a democratic society that recognized workers as human beings and guaranteed their rights as citizens. Many workers recalled, when they first learned about the Labor Standards Act, that they felt like a new horizon was opening up before them. The case of a woman welder Kim Chinsuk—who helped democratize the Hanjin Heavy Industries Union in the 1980s and who recently became a national phenomenon in her 309-day "high-altitude" (*kogong*) sit-in protest on top of a crane over dismissal of workers—is an especially telling and well-documented case in point.[47] Chun Tae-il and his friends pinned their hope for the improvement of garment workers' conditions on the implementation of the provisions of these labor laws. What became Chun's immolation was originally planned as a funeral ritual in which the law book Chun carried around with him would be burned. Performing the funeral of the labor laws was a call to substantiate the laws in practice.

What exactly then was the socioeconomic system Chun Tae-il saw in the laws? For Cho and other intellectuals, Chun's fascination with the law was merely a step that Chun had to go through before reaching the inevitable

conclusion that one had to fight against the authoritarian government. Chun's model company plan receives a similar treatment. Cho explains Chun's various efforts to implement the plan, including the drastic idea of selling one of his eyes to raise funds for the company, as a function of his desperate search for an alternative method of struggle so that he could avoid the last option of committing suicide.[48] As a result, biographer Cho does not pay much attention to the model company plan itself and what it might have meant in terms of Chun's vision for a desirable capitalist system. This model company plan, in which Chun and his friends establish an ethical company that follows all the provisions of the Labor Standards Act and still makes a profit, was meant to demonstrate to the whole society that it was possible to run successful companies while treating workers well. It was a kind of capitalism with a human face, which, for workers, was what the Labor Standards Act represented. The law's existence and non-compliance with it captured the contradiction between the logic of a capitalist, developmentalist economy and the promise of democracy. The workers' act of burning a labor law book in protest was in effect a radical critique of the South Korean version of capitalist democracy. From industrial workers' perspectives the Labor Standards Act was democracy.

Cho Yŏngnae saw the radical potential of Chun Tae-il's vision in Chun's statements on worker alienation in a capitalist system of production, but, while acknowledging the humanist philosophical depth of Chun's thinking, he did not seriously consider the possibility that Chun's vision might harbor radical insights for the democracy movement in developing an alternative vision to Park regime's developmental economics. Hardly helpless victims who required a rescue mission by intellectuals, workers were clamoring to have their rights, written in the nation's laws, substantiated in real life. Through vocal claims such as "Obey the Labor Standards Law!" they revealed the contradictions inherent in South Korean capitalist politics. Economic ideas resonating with Chun Tae-il's vision formed the basis of the 1971 presidential electoral bid of Kim Dae Jung's opposition party soon after Chun's suicide. *Dae Jung* (mass) economics was further developed into economist Pak Hyŏnch'ae's *Minjok* (nation-centered) economics over the 1970s and 1980s.[49]

These new ideas coming out of the dissident movement, however, remained vague on the contradictions Chun pushed through to public awareness so dramatically.[50] A fundamental question Chun put forward was

whether it would be possible for the South Korean economy—considering its position in the world market at the time—to obey the labor laws and still survive and develop. In his petition letter to President Park and labor inspectors (*kŭllo kamdokkwan*), which he wrote around November of 1969 but never mailed, Chun Tae-il asks why the state does not protect the "good- and pure-hearted *tongsim*," while acknowledging that "this might be a common pattern among developing countries (*palchŏn tosangguk*)."[51] "Our laws are formulated to fit the reality we live in," he continues, and "when there is discrepancy, it is the right attitude to try to fit them better." After describing cruel working conditions in violation of laws, Chun asks, is this "unavoidable for the economic development of the country?" In the list of demands he includes in the letter, he concludes that economic justice and development are not antithetical: "I swear that these are not unreasonable demands. These are the minimum demands for a human being. These items are the ones that employers can implement without much difficulty."[52] Cho's biography and the activist and scholarly commentary on Chun Tae-il and his legacy is silent on these vital questions.

UNDERSTANDING BIOGRAPHER CHO YŎNGNAE'S VIEW OF CHUN TAE-IL

Why did Cho Yŏngnae, one of the best minds among the dissident intellectuals of the time, fail to see how meaningful Chun's dreams might be in the task of rethinking "democracy" and reconceptualizing "development"? While both Cho and Chun were men of similar age (Cho was a year older than Chun), hailed from the city of Taegu, and were and are admired for similar personal traits of compassion, courage, and intellect, they stood at the opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of social and educational backgrounds. Cho Yŏngnae went through Kyŏnggi High School and to the College of Law at Seoul National University (he entered it with the top score), thus following the most coveted "KS (Kyŏnggi-SNU)" route of joining the elite stratum in the South Korean society at the time. Cho was preparing for the national bar exam when he learned about Chun's self-immolation. He tore himself away from his studies to organize an SNU College of Law-sponsored funeral for Chun and also penned a student declaration supporting Chun's cause. A student activist since his high school days (he was suspended from school in 1964 after leading a

demonstration against the South Korea-Japan Normalization Treaty negotiations), he spent most of the 1970s either in prison (October 1971–April 1973) or in hiding (April 1974–January 1980).[53] While dodging police surveillance Cho immersed himself in the dissident movement and worked on the biography of Chun Tae-il. He is also known for playing a central role in editing and disseminating the historic "Yangsim sŏnŏn" (Declaration of conscience) by dissident poet and political prisoner, Kim Chiha.[54]

After becoming a lawyer in 1983, Cho took on a series of landmark cases on human rights, women's rights, and environmental and labor issues, as well as the infamous Puch'ŏn police sex torture case of 1986, which revealed the extremely immoral nature of the authoritarian regime to the public and helped build the momentum for the June democracy struggle of the following year. As a KBS documentary later put it, Cho was "the Chun Tae-il with a law degree," who "lived the life of Chun Tae-il that Chun had to give up."[55] Cho Yŏngnae was one of the most respected human rights lawyers and democracy movement activists of the 1980s. In his influential book on the history of South Korean human rights legal practices, Pak Wŏnsun, himself a respected human-rights lawyer and the mayor of Seoul since October 2011, gave Cho the moniker "a legend [*chŏnsŏl*] among human-rights lawyers."[56]

Knowing Cho Yŏngnae's place in the democracy movement of the 1960s and the 1970s helps us understand his humanistic reading of Chun Tae-il's story. Although Cho, as an intellectual activist, was seriously interested in understanding lower-class working people's suffering as part of the dissident movement's critique of the Park regime's developmental policies, the early to mid-1970s was a time when socialist ideas—obliquely called "social science" ideas at the time—were not yet widely disseminated and the concept of "minjung" was still in the making. As his friend and law scholar An Kyŏnghwan sees it, Cho remained a liberal and a humanist, rather than transitioning into a socialist position that foregrounds class struggle. An even argues that Cho "did not acknowledge a separate class of workers" while showing deep empathy and respect toward them as fellow human beings.[57] Liberal democracy, according to An, was the ideological foundation of the 1960s student movement, as the South Korean student movement in general had pulled away from socialist ideas beginning in the late 1950s.[58] In addition, Cho, as a student activist, seems to have had only a limited knowledge of the history of the labor movement.[59]

As we have seen, the Chun Tae-il in Cho's narration is depicted first and foremost as an awakened working-class individual, an exceptional thinker who could see and analyze fundamental problems in the human conditions despite his lack of education. Through Cho's powerful prose Chun comes across as a sincere and authentic person with fully developed interiority and a keen sense of mission, whom readers, intellectual activists in particular, could relate to as a fellow thinker and activist. The unjust capitalist system of South Korea that Chun was protesting is in Cho's purview but not given much further analysis beyond relaying Chun's words. Dissident elites of the 1970s, as political scientist Kim Pohyŏn persuasively points out, in essence shared the nationalist developmental logic of the Park regime, and their criticism of the latter mostly pivoted on the charges of immorality and corruption.[60] Furthermore, in Cho's analysis Chun and his friends are not situated as members of a particular segment of the industrial working class, one that was at the margin of the South Korean industrial system. Readers would not know that Chun's garment workers remained outside labor law protections, in contrast to the organized, regularly employed, better-paid, large-factory workers who formed the core of the South Korean industrial relations system. Instead, the biography tells Chun's story as a universal story of the suffering of the South Korean working-class people under the unjust regime, and Chun's claim of labor rights tends to slip into a more general claim of basic human rights.

Cho Yŏngnae acknowledges Chun Tae-il as an organic intellectual of non-elite background, but it does not seem that Cho saw Chun Tae-il as part of an emergent phenomenon of worker intellectuals with distinctive worldviews and desires. Chun appears in the biography more as a lone hero, an exceptional figure. Consequently, other workers in the story, including Chun's friends and fellow activists in the garment workers' movement in the Peace Market, are not given much agency or voices in Cho's narrative. Chun's "friends" are mentioned in several places in the biography, yet character development of these "friends," who were, in fact, fellow labor organizers, is lacking, and we do not hear their side of the story. The brotherhood between Chun and his male colleagues is assumed yet hardly discussed. Instead, Chun Tae-il is mainly positioned in his relationship to the dissident intellectuals as an unusual non-elite thinker who jolted intellectuals to see the truth about the suffering *minjung*.

During the 1960s, the decade that the April 1960 Revolution opened, a narrative regarding the appearance of a new generation of young male students, the so-called young lions, gained traction in the media, and the following decade of the 1970s saw an explosion of a rebellious youth culture, which was heavily influenced by imported knowledge of its US counterpart.[61] Compared to the images of these "young lions" of the 1960s, and of youth—especially college-youth—culture in the 1970s, media representation of young male industrial workers was scarce. If the Chun Tae-il incident was the event that allowed people to "visualize the image of the proletariat in the South Korean society" for the first time, as labor scholar Yu Kyŏngsun argues, there existed a possibility of grasping the emergence of a new generation of young male industrial workers (a segment of the population growing rapidly in the late 1960s) and a new working-class male subjectivity through Chun Tae-il's story.[62] The treatment of Chun as an exceptional human being in Cho's biography, however, did not leave much room for such imagination.

Instead of seeing Chun Tae-il as one of the multiple Chun Tae-ils in South Korea's industrial scene, a particular statement of Chun Tae-il struck a deep chord among university students immediately after his death and the biography features it prominently in its narrative.[63] "If I had a university student friend . . . " Chun Tae-il laments when he has trouble understanding difficult legal jargon in the *Guide to the Labor Standards Act* he was trying to master. This utterance is blown out of proportion as Chun Tae-il's call for help from university students. And this university-student-friend discourse becomes central in intellectual activists' understanding of their critical role in the labor movement over the following decades. Many intellectual activists, when recalling what motivated them to plunge into the labor movement or the dissident movement, almost invariably mention the experience of encountering this particular statement. Chun Tae-il, when he uttered the phrase, might have meant that he was in need of the knowledge of a "*university-student* friend," but for university students the word "*friend*" was what provoked a sense of guilt and put moral pressure on them to respond to Chun's call. When the *nohak yŏndae* mission of students and intellectuals is thus highlighted, voices and actions of other garment workers, even Chun's contemporaries who fought together with him, are pushed to the margins.

SELF-IMMOLATION AND THE MARTYRDOM

Cho Yŏngnae was, according to his biographer An Kyŏnghwan, a deeply Buddhist person, although Buddhism for him was a "way of life" (*saenghwal kyubŏm*) or "philosophy and ethics" rather than a religious faith in the strict sense.[64] He was keenly aware of the responsibility of the people with religious faith in society, and he played a role in the emergence of a progressive Buddhist movement over the 1980s.[65] For Cho and other Buddhist students serious about the question of social participation by people of religious faith, the news of Vietnamese monk Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation on a Saigon street in June 1963, and especially the iconic photo of him engulfed in flames, offered an unforgettable moment of awe and inspiration.[66] The shocking imagery of the time-honored Buddhist practice of *sosin kongyang* by monk Thich Quang Duc recalled, for many Korean intellectuals, a similar scene in a highly acclaimed 1961 novel by Kim Tongni, titled *Tŭngsinbul* (Life-sized Buddha), in the *Sasanggye* (The thought world), a premier journal of the day for intellectuals.[67] Other subsequent cases of political martyrdom by self-immolation, including the January 1969 incident in Czechoslovakia by student activist Jan Palach and several US cases in protest of the Vietnam War, were widely known through active media reports in South Korea. An Kyŏnghwan speculates that in this context the news of Chun Tae-il's immolation immediately conjured up, in the mind of Cho, the notion of *sosin kongyang*.[68]

It is not clear whether Chun Tae-il himself was aware of domestic and foreign cases of *punsin* (setting one's own body on fire) as means of protest. But media attention to self-immolation cases abroad facilitated a disturbing new social phenomenon of *punsin* as a method of suicide in South Korea in the 1960s. Whether Chun was conscious of the symbolism of self-immolation as political protest or not, the South Korean newspaper-reading public who confronted the news of Chun Tae-il's action had a rich field of imagery and knowledge about a global phenomenon of suicide-protest via self-immolation as well as a familiarity with domestic non-political cases of self-immolation suicides. And, of course, Korean perceptions of honorable death by suicide, be it by women for chastity or by elite men for loyalty, had been part of the Korean social and political repertoire for centuries. Early twentieth-century Korea saw celebrated cases of suicide-protest against Japanese imperialism, exemplified by the suicides of Min Yŏnghwan and Pak Sŏnghwan in 1905 and 1907, respec-

tively. These celebrated deaths and also life-risking anti-Japanese *ŭiyŏl* (righteous and loyal) missions of nationalist activists popularized the concept of *sun'guk*, dying for the country. This modern notion of *sun'guk* was interwoven into the premodern notions of chastity- and loyalty-suicides and religious notions of martyrdom, becoming part of a unique Korean political culture endorsing suicide action for a worthy cause. Chun's suicide, in turn, added another layer of meaning to the Korean perception of righteous death and augmented the moral power of protest-suicide. In other words, the Korean historical context, both long-term and short-term, shaped the ways Koreans give meaning to death and suicide for a cause, and Chun Tae-il's action and the reading of it should be understood in the context of that history.

Suicide can be understood as an extreme form of communication.[69] Suicide-as-protest is an action of "dying to tell" a story in the hope of arousing an audience to action.[70] Suicide by self-immolation inflicts the worst kinds of pain and agony on the actor and thus makes the moral claim of the actor that much higher. The psychological shock and trauma that the flame, the smell, and the charred body of the martyr present to viewers is profound. Many incidents of self-immolation worldwide from the 1960s on have functioned as a spark that ignited a wave of political resistance. The recent incident by a young Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, in December 2010, and its relationship to the Arab Spring, is well known.[71] Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns have performed *sosin kongyang*, burning for the Buddha, numerous times since 2009.[72] It is clear that this ritual of expressing a burning sense of indignation at injustice through burning one's own body will not disappear any time soon from the vocabulary of the social and political movements of our time.

Cho Yŏngnae's biography of Chun Tae-il played a critical role in allowing suicide to be incorporated into the dissident political culture as a legitimate dimension of it. When we consider Cho's *sosin kongyang* frame of understanding Chun's death as well as the urgent need he, as an activist, felt to produce a tale of a hero that could galvanize the potential participants in the democracy movement, the exaltation of Chun's suicide as a noble act in the biography makes good sense.[73] Unfortunately, however, Cho's powerful narrative endorsing Chun's choice ended up contributing to the rise of a troubling phenomenon of martyrdom deaths by worker and student activists in subsequent decades, especially from the late 1980s through the 1990s. In his article

tracing the evolution of discourses about Chun Tae-il over the 1970s and 1980s, Sin Pyŏnghyŏn sees the 1980s as the period when the discourse of Chun as martyr emerged (1980–87) and the mythologization of Chun's life happened (1988–90).[74] A major factor behind the rise of the martyrdom discourse in South Korea in the 1980s was the massacre at Kwangju in 1980, which significantly altered the emotive terrain of social movement activists by forcing them to confront the questions of state violence, heroic death, and the responsibility of those who survived. In a way the radicalization of the dissident movement that occurred in the aftermath of the Kwangju experience obscured the complexity of the Chun Tae-il story. "Death" became the keyword of the era, and dedication to the cause of the movement, even to the point of sacrificing one's own life (*hŏnsin*), became the unquestionable norm for activists.[75]

Later in life Cho Yŏngnae apparently had a difficult time coping with the unintended consequences of his influential writing. In 1990, when Cheonggye Garment Workers' Union activist Min Chongdŏk visited Cho at his hospital bed to get permission to reveal the identity of the author in the revised edition, Cho told him that he made two mistakes when writing the biography. One was that he conceived of his audience as intellectual readers, which influenced the way he wrote the story, and the second, "more serious mistake," was that his storytelling "glamorized" (*mihwa*) self-immolation.[76] According to his wife, Yi Okkyŏng, he said, "[i]f I wrote now, I would not write that way."[77] He also wanted to have a *ch'ŏndojae*, a Buddhist rite sending off the spirit of the dead to Buddhist paradise, performed for those activists who had chosen to commit suicide-protest following in the footsteps of Chun Tae-il.[78] The inordinate focus on Chun's noble death in the biography also made it difficult to see other workers in the shoes of Chun, a martyr, and turned attention away from other non-suicide methods of struggle that Chun himself contemplated in his diary.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE "MINJUNG" AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LABOR MOVEMENT

As I have argued elsewhere, the impact of the labor struggle was much more profound on the South Korean industrial relations system and the liberal democratic order in general than is conventionally acknowledged by scholars.

The Chun Tae-il incident came on the heels of a wave of labor militancy in the second half of the 1960s and by 1969 the Park regime saw the empowerment of industrial labor as a serious threat to its developmental plan.[79] The narrative of the "discovery" of the *minjung* in the 1970s also tends to obscure the fact that there existed a long-standing effort among a small minority of progressive intellectuals and activists throughout the 1960s to intervene in the labor question. The Protestant Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) movement and that of the Catholic JOC (Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne; Young Christian Workers) were ongoing since the late 1950s in major industrial areas, and some intellectual activists were burrowing into the FKTU (Federation of Korean Trade Unions) as union officials seeking to bring about reforms of the state-sanctioned labor organization from within.[80]

Cho Yŏngnae, like most contemporary intellectual activists, fails to see Chun Tae-il as part of this rising tide of labor activism, and instead portrays him as a lonely worker/thinker who had to resort to an extreme measure because the labor movement in South Korea was a "wretched wasteland" (*ch'ŏjŏlhan pulmoji*).[81] For Cho, after the postwar red purges, the existing union movement was nothing other than *ŏyong*—pro-company and pro-government—in nature.[82] Like Cho, for most intellectual activists, the encounter with Chun Tae-il happened before their discovery of the history of the Korean labor movement. This blind spot in Cho's biography contrasts with the labor-centered perspectives of some of Cho's contemporaries, such as the economist Pak Hyŏnch'ae, whose work shows a keen awareness of the continuing pulse (*maek*) of the labor movement and the growth, albeit intermittent, of the movement's capacity through the 1960s and the 1970s.[83] But Pak belonged to a tiny minority of leftist intellectuals during this period, and in general the labor movement was invisible to most elite thinkers.

The industrial worker *minjung* that was "discovered" in the 1970s by intellectuals was ironically represented by *yŏgong* (female factory workers), the most exploited group among industrial workers. Male industrial workers, except for the hero Chun Tae-il, were relegated to the margins. And it was female workers who spearheaded the new militant labor movement of the 1970s in the *nohak yŏndae* alliance with students, Christian activists, and other intellectuals. As Chun was being exalted as a hero martyr, other male workers, including Chun's friends, began to lose their independent voices as they were perceived through an abstract notion of the *minjung* and positioned as

partners or foot soldiers in the battle for democracy. In most intellectuals' minds workers were rarely understood as the successors to the long and tumultuous history of working people's struggle in Korea. In Cho's biography and in the *minjung* discourse generally, workers and labor-management relations tended to be essentialized. The particular characteristics of Peace Market garment workers as sweatshop workers, or the characteristics of their often financially strapped entrepreneurial small business employers, some of whom, including Chun's boss at Samilsa, were refugees from the North, were not investigated or explained.[84] Perhaps most problematic of all in *minjung* discourse and Cho's biography is a thorough lack of gender as a category of analysis. Women sewing machine operators' agency does not appear, and no question is raised about an obvious anomaly in the story: why a male worker, together with his male garment cutter colleagues, fought for female *sida* workers, completely bypassing the senior women machine operators altogether?[85] Why was protecting the *tongsim* so important for Chun Tae-il, and why did he not reach out to the senior women workers for help?

One clue comes from historian Lynn Hunt's work on the French Revolution, which South Korean literary and film scholars have applied in the framework of "family romance" or "familial storytelling" (*kajok iyagi*) to trace the process of modern subjectivity formation in twentieth-century Korean history.[86] According to these scholars, Korean young men, like their eighteenth-century French counterparts, had to grapple with the question of nation-building and modern subjectivity while rebelling against the authorities in a culture deeply imbued with familial imagination. In this light, Chun can be seen as imagining his place in the familial/social order as an elder brother figure who, in solidarity with fellow male workers, takes charge of the role of protecting younger sister-workers in defiance of the government authorities and employers. In this familial story, women are relegated to the position of protectees, or, when agency is allocated, come into the picture as sacrificing selfless mothers.[87] From this angle we can better understand the importance to Chun Tae-il's self-identity of his rescue mission for young *sida* sisters. It is abundantly clear from Chun's writings that he cherished his elder-brother role and the leadership position he established among fellow male workers. But Chun's familial romance clashes with the subject position assumed by elite intellectual activists like Cho Yŏngnae when approaching workers.[88] Foregrounding of the university-student friend relation in this

context is thus, I believe, a significant misreading of Chun Tae-il's male subjectivity. Through Chun Tae-il, elite young men like Cho "discovered" the *minjung*, their younger brother and sister figures, in industrial workers, whom they would dedicate their lives to enlighten and help. At the same time, clues to a similar imagining of the familial relationships Chun forged with other workers were explained away as signs of Chun's universal love.

We are now in a position to gauge the implications of the labor martyr Chun Tae-il story, which Cho's biography helped establish. We can begin by asking what would have changed if Cho Yŏngnae had seen Chun Tae-il as part of a newly emerging group of organic intellectuals among the working-class population. What if Cho had delved into a serious study of their vision of a desirable system of capitalist economy and politics? What if Cho had understood the democratic potential of the labor laws and the positive legacy of the Korean labor movement that created the conditions of the laws' promulgation? If he, like Chun, had acknowledged the complexity of labor market conditions in Korea as a developing country and taken up the other options that Chun laid out before giving such a resounding endorsement to Chun's decision of "dying to tell," might the rise of the martyrdom discourse over the 1980s have been prevented? Without the effective symbol of martyr Chun Tae-il would the phenomenon of self-immolation suicide have taken root in the *minjung* movement? Would the nature of intellectual intervention into the labor movement in the subsequent decades have evolved differently?

Of course one biography cannot explain the trajectory of the South Korean *minjung* movement. Much happened in the 1980s, not only the impact of the Kwangju Massacre but also the rising influence of socialist and Marxist-Leninist ideologies in the democracy movement and, of course, the maturing of the South Korean economy, all of which impacted the nature of the labor and dissident movements. Still, it is clear that, to a great extent, the biography's narrative continues to reverberate in mainstream labor discourse today, especially the idea that Chun's death marked a new beginning for the labor movement, as the "single spark" that started the wildfire of the *minju* labor movement. "Everything started from him" (*Modŭn kŏt ŭn kŭ saram ŭrobuťŏ sijak toeŏtta*), as the title of the prologue to the recent historical account of the Cheonggye Garment Workers' Union puts it.[89] This understanding has become a cliché both in the movement and in academia. The Manichean vision of the nobleness of the democracy movement and the *minjung* versus

the heartlessness of the authoritarian Park regime that Cho's biography put forward had the effect of erasing the history of a decades-long struggle by the industrial workers themselves and, more importantly, the workers' thoughts on the kind of society to build and how to build it. This chapter is a small effort to move beyond the recognition and respect for Chun's sacrifice for fellow workers and excavate fragments of Chun's dreams that one intellectual interpreter, a tremendously compassionate and conscientious thinker himself, did not weave into his story in the politically charged environment of an all-out struggle against Yusin authoritarian rule.

NOTES

1. Chŏng Hŭiwan, "Kkŭnnaji anŭn punsin" [Self-immolation that has not ended], 1–3, *Kyŏnghyang sinmun*, March 8, March 10, and March 12, 2015.

2. Minjok Minju Yŏlsa-hŭisaengja (Kinyŏm) Tanch'e Yŏndae Hoeŭi, et al., *Kkŭnnae sallira: Minjok minju yŏlsa-hŭisaengja charyojip* [They shall live: A sourcebook of martyrs-victims of the struggle for nationalism and democracy], 412–16. After Chun's death in 1970, twenty-four workers chose self-immolation in the 1980s, fifteen in the 1990s, and five between 2002 and 2004. According to this sourcebook, from 1985 to 2004 thirty-one non-workers also protested through self-immolation. Among these non-workers twenty-one were student activists. Student self-immolation deaths first occurred in 1985 and ended in 1997.

3. For representative accounts in English of the significance of Chun Tae-il's suicide, see Hagen Koo, *Korean Workers*, 69–72; and George E. Ogle, *South Korea*, 72–75 and 113.

4. Ko Ŭn, "I chugŭm ŭro haebang iyŏ sara ora: I sidae minjok minju yŏlsa sip'yŏn" [With this death, come to life dear liberation: Poems of martyrs of nationalism and democracy in this epoch of ours], 86–87.

5. The literature presenting this viewpoint is too large to list here, beginning with the preface by author Cho Yŏngnae in his *Chŏn T'aeil p'yŏngjŏn* [A critical biography of Chun Tae-il]. In addition to the aforementioned books by Hagen Koo and George E. Ogle, see Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 375–76; Chŏng Hyŏnbaek, "Uri an ŭi 'Chŏn T'aeil,' kŭrigo kiŏk ŭi chŏngch'i" ["Chun Tae-il" within us, and the politics of memory], 231; and Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 218–22.

6. Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 218.

7. On the emerging discussion among a small number of student activists about the importance of the labor question and the need to enter the *hyŏnjang*, meaning where actions are happening such as industrial workshops and slum areas, see Yu Kyŏngsun, "Chaengchŏm ŭro ponŭn 1970–86–yŏn nodong undongsa" [The history of the labor

movement from 1970 to 1986 seen through key issues]. The first cases of intellectuals going into factories happened in the late 1960s, beginning with Kim Chŏnggang and Im Muhyŏn at the end of 1966. Ibid., 59.

8. On the effect of Chun's death on intellectuals, see An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn: Sesang ŭl pakkun arŭmdaun yŏlchŏng* [A critical biography of Cho Yŏngnae: A beautiful passion that changed the world], 206–17; O Chaesik, *Na ege kkot ŭro tagaonŭn hyŏnjang* [The hyŏnjang that comes to me like flowers], 138–47; Kim Namil, *An Pyŏngmu p'yŏngjŏn: Sŏngmun pak esŏ Yesu rŭl marhada* [A critical biography of An Pyŏngmu: Speaking of Jesus outside the city gate], 159–65; Sin Sunae, *Yŏl sesal yŏgong ŭi sam: Han yŏsŏng nodongja ŭi chagi yŏksa ssŭgi* [Life of a thirteen-year-old factory girl: A female worker writes her own history], 10; Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 222; Yu Kyŏngsun, "Haksaeng undonggadŭl ŭi nodong undong ch'amyŏ yangsang kwa yŏnghyang" [The ways in which student movement activists enter the labor movement and their effect], 84; and Sin Illyŏng, "Ŏmŏni, na ege mani paeun ch'in'gu ka han-myŏng man ittamyŏn [Mother, if only I had a single friend with higher education]. Also helpful are Yuk Sŏngch'ŏl, "Chŏn T'aeil punsin 30-yŏn: Insaeng ŭl pakkun saramdŭl [Thirty years from the self-immolation of Chun Tae-il: People whose lives were forever changed]; and Manabe Yūko, *Resshi no tanjō: Kankoku no minshū undo ni okeru han no rikigaku* [The birth of a martyr: The dynamics of han in the minjung movement in South Korea], 48. An Kyŏnghwan sees Chun's death as "a torch that announces the beginning of a new era" but "those who saw that torch at the time were not many." An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 207. Namhee Lee also says that those who "remained involved in labor long after all the public outcry had ceased" were in "small number." Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 221. Media interest in Chun Tae-il also subsided by early 1971, especially after the April 1971 presidential election was over. Here I would like to add caution that later recollections on the impact of Chun's death as motivating force for people's entrance into activism need to be scrutinized carefully considering the influence of the hegemonic discourse of the historic significance of Chun's death that became deeply entrenched over the 1980s and 1990s.

9. Women's studies scholars Kim Hyŏn'gyŏng and Kim Chuhŭi coin this as "an event" of "self-awakening" through reading *A Critical Biography of Chun Tae-il* and note that it became a recognizable pattern among worker activists. Kim Hyŏn'gyŏng and Kim Chuhŭi, "'(Yŏsŏng) nodongja' Kim Chinsuk e taehan yŏsŏngjuŭijŏk tokhae" [A feminist reading of "(female) worker" Kim Chinsuk], 19. Kim Hyŏn'gyŏng and Kim Chuhŭi attempt a feminist reading of the story of Hanjin Heavy Industries woman welder Kim Chinsuk. For Kim Chinsuk's own recollection about the matter, see Kim Chinsuk, *Sogŭm kkot namu* [Salt flower tree], 46–47. Dong-il Textile worker activist Yi Ch'onggak describes her reaction to the news of Chun's self-immolation as "a shock

as if I had been hit on the head by a hammer." Yi Ch'onggak and Pak Minna, "Kil ŭl ch'ajasŏ: Yi Ch'onggak—Uridŭl ŭi taejang, Ch'onggak ŏnni" [Finding my way: Yi Ch'onggak—Our commander, Elder Sister Ch'onggak], Episode 12 (June 3, 2013). See also Mun Sŏnghyŏn's recollection in Mun Sŏnghyŏn, "Na ŭi nodong undong kwa 'sara innŭn' Chŏn T'aeildŭl" [My labor movement and the "living" Chun Tae-ils] on the biography's impact on him and many other worker activists. Chŏng Tosang details the case of Pak Yŏngjin, a worker activist at Shinheung Precision Co., who was greatly influenced by the Chun Tae-il story and followed suit by setting himself on fire during a violent attack by the save-the-company corps and the police on a sit-in strike on March 18, 1986. Chŏng Tosang, *Ch'ŏnman kae ŭi pulkkot ŭro t'aollara: Nodong yŏlsa Pak Yŏngjin ŭi sam ŭl kŭrin silmyŏng sosŏl* [Blaze up as ten million flames: A fictionalized biography that depicts Labor Martyr Pak Yŏngjin's life].

10. How Cho's biography and other labor literature of the 1970s and 1980s produced this particular discourse of the new democratic labor movement is a well-studied topic. Political scientist Kim Wŏn and others have illuminated several key dimensions of that discourse, including the clear dichotomy between the *ŏyong* (pro-company, pro-government) forces and the *minju* (democratic) unions, and the "attic" discourse that tethers the young female worker to a helpless victim position. In the infamous "work attics" (*tarakpang*) the distance from the floor to ceiling was less than five feet, not allowing a worker to stand upright. See Kim Wŏn, *Yŏgong 1970 kŭnyŏdŭl ŭi pan yŏksa* [Factory women 1970: Their anti-history]. Kim Wŏn, et al., *Sarajin chŏngch'i ŭi changsodŭl* [Sites of politics now long gone] provides a critical re-evaluation of the *minju* labor movement discourses and practices. For a list of martyr-deaths since Chun Tae-il through the 1990s, see Kim Chaeŭn, "Minjuhwa undong kwajŏng esŏ kusŏngdoen chuch'e wich'i ŭi 'sŏngbyŏlhwa' e kwanhan yŏn'gu, 1985–1991" [A study on the gendered subjectivities constructed in the pro-democracy movement in South Korea, 1985–1991], 4; Kim Wŏn, *Ich'yŏjin kŏttŭl e taehan kiŏk: 1980–yŏndae taehak ŭi hawi munhwa wa taejung chŏngch'i* [Memories of all that is forgotten: College subculture and mass politics in the 1980s], 318–19; and Minjok Minju Yŏlsa-hŭisaengja (Kinyŏm) Tanch'e Yŏndae Hoeŭi, et al., *Kkŭnnae sallira*.

11. Some of Chun's writings were lost; what remains of his written work was published in 1988 as Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Chŏn T'aeil chŏnjip: Nae chugŭm ŭl hŏttoei malla—Ilgi sugi p'yŏnji moŭm* [The collected works of Chun Tae-il: Don't let my death be in vain—A collection of diaries, essays, and letters] by Tolbegae Publishers.

12. Ibid., 144–48.

13. Ibid., 148.

14. Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 218–23; Hagen Koo, *Korean Workers*, 69–72; Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Ŏnŭ ch'ŏngnyŏn nodongja ŭi sam kwa*

chugŭm: Chŏn T'aeil p'yŏngjŏn [The life and death of a young worker: A critical biography of Chun Tae-il], 19–27 and 237–51; and An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 207–20.

15. Cho completed the draft manuscript in the fall of 1976, and it was smuggled out to Hanmint'ong (Han'guk Minjujuŭi Hoebok T'ongil Ch'okchin Kungmin Hoeŭi) in Japan in the fall of 1977 through the efforts of many courageous individuals. It was translated and published as *Honooyo, watashio tsutsume: Aru Kankoku seinen rōdōsha no sei to shi* [Oh flame, envelop me: The life and death of a young Korean worker] in 1978 and made into a film, *Ŏmŏni* [Mother], by Hanmint'ong the same year. An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 228–29. Then in 1983, Tolbegae, a progressive publisher in South Korea, published the manuscript as *Ŏnŭ ch'ŏngnyŏn nodongja ŭi sam kwa chugŭm: Chŏn T'aeil p'yŏngjŏn* using the name of Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe [The committee to establish Chun Tae-il commemorative museum] to disguise the identity of the author Cho Yŏngnae. The book was immediately banned. Tolbegae was able to publish a revised edition in Cho's name in 1991 with the title of *Chŏn T'aeil p'yŏngjŏn*, and an English translation, titled *A Single Spark: The Biography of Chun Tae-il*, came out in 2003. Cho Yŏngnae passed away on December 12, 1990, less than a month before the revised biography with his name on it was published in early January 1991. The biography became the "classic of the era" in the 1980s and sold very well, despite the government's banning of the book. By the early 1990s already about 100,000 copies had been sold, and more than 300,000 copies had been sold by the mid-2000s. See Ch'ŏn Chŏnghwan, "'Chŏn T'aeil iyagi' wa yŏnghwa: *Arŭmdaun ch'ŏngnyŏn Chŏn T'aeil* ŭi chejak suyong kwajŏng" [The "Chun Tae-il story" and film: The process of making and consuming *A Single Spark*], 134.

16. See Korea Broadcasting Station (KBS), "Chinsil ŭn kamok e kadul su ŏpta, Cho Yŏngnae" [The truth cannot be detained in prison, Cho Yŏngnae]. Chang Kip'yo in the documentary states that the biography played a tremendously important role as the "primer of the *undongkwŏn*" (the dissident movement). He asks, "Is it possible to have a Jesus without a Bible?" Also see Ch'ŏn Chŏnghwan, "'Chŏn T'aeil iyagi' wa yŏnghwa," 134; Kim Wŏn, *Yŏgong 1970 kŭnyŏdŭl ŭi pan yŏksa*, 97. According to Ch'ŏn Chŏnghwan, the biography "was read as the ethics textbook for university students and workers." Ch'ŏn Chŏnghwan, "'Chŏn T'aeil iyagi' wa yŏnghwa," 134.

17. On the NFDYS case, see Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 170–71, and Paul Y. Chang, *Protest Dialectics*, 70–73. The film on Chun Tae-il, *Arŭmdaun ch'ŏngnyŏn Chŏn T'aeil* (A single spark, 1995), describes this process. Like many other intellectuals of the time, Cho Yŏngnae also felt deep remorse when learning about Chun's wish to have a university-student friend, and decided to become that friend. He tried everything he could do to understand Chun's life and "to let him live" again, and in the process he was himself "being reborn." Pak Wŏnsun, "'Inkwŏn pyŏnhosa ŭi chŏnsŏl,' Cho Yŏngnae pyŏnhosa" ["A legend among human-rights lawyers," Lawyer Cho Yŏngnae], 416–17.

18. The movie was partly funded by a national fundraising campaign, in which over 7,600 individuals and civil society organizations participated, and attracted about half a million moviegoers. Ch'ŏn Chŏnghwan, "'Chŏn T'aeil iyagi' wa yŏnghwa," 144–48.

19. George E. Ogle, *South Korea*, 23.

20. Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Ŏnŭ ch'ŏngnyŏn nodongja ŭi sam kwa chugŭm*, 240–48; and O Chaesik, *Na ege kkot ŭro tagaonŭn hyŏnjang*, 145–47. An states that O Chaesik's use of the term "a Jesus" was merely a rhetorical expression. An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 216. O Kyŏnghwan, on the other hand, published a book that raises Chun Tae-il to the level of the great religious founders in world history, although his view never gained much traction. O Kyŏnghwan, *Chŏn T'aeil sasang yŏn'gu* [A study of the Chun Tae-il thought].

21. That in Christian theology suicide is regarded as a sin was an obvious obstacle Christians encountered in their effort to tell the story of Chun's suicide as a martyrdom narrative. Chun's suicide did not sit well with some ministers, who denounced Chun's action as sin. Chun left an enigmatic entry about a quarrel between him and a minister on certain theological issues while he was working from April to September 1970 as a laborer at the construction site of the Immanuel Prayer House at Mt. Pukhan. This was the time when Chun finally made up his mind to sacrifice his life to appeal to society as a whole regarding deplorable sweatshop conditions in the garment industry. Some ministers refused to allow Chun's funeral to be held at their churches. See An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 208 and O Chaesik, *Na ege kkot ŭro tagaonŭn hyŏnjang*, 143–44.

22. Chun's mother Yi Sosŏn was a devout Christian, a deaconess at Ch'anghyŏn Church, where Chun Tae-il also served as a Sunday school teacher for a time. See Cho Yŏngnae, *Chŏn T'aeil p'yongjŏn* (1991 edition), 287. Friends recall that Chun "acted like a Sunday school teacher." He never swore and did not smoke nor drink alcohol. An Chaesŏng, *Ch'ŏnggye, nae ch'ŏngch'un: Ch'ŏnggye p'ibok nojo ŭi pinnanŭn kiŏk* [Ch'onggye of my youth: The splendid memory of the Cheonggye Garment Union], 232. Chun's tombstone epigraph says, "The tomb of a Christian youth Chun Tae-il." A photograph of the tombstone is included in Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Chŏn T'aeil chŏnjip*; and Cho Yŏngnae, *Chŏn T'aeil p'yŏngjŏn* (2009 edition).

23. Ham Sŏkhŏn rushed to Chun Tae-il's house upon hearing about his death and consoled mother Yi Sosŏn saying that "Your son died to awaken us sinners. We are so ashamed." An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 208. He wrote the foreword, titled "I ap'ŭm, i chinsil, i sarang" [This pain, this truth, this love], for the first edition of the biography. On the profound theological change Chun's death brought about in An Pyŏngmu, see Kim Namil, *An Pyŏngmu p'yŏngjŏn*, 163–67 and 206–8. An Pyŏngmu saw in Chun Tae-il the image of Jesus "carrying a heavy and weighty cross up the hill of Golgotha," and asks to himself, "Where were you!" He thought, according to his biog-

rapher Kim, that "indifference to and ignorance of the reality of the minjung can never be exonerated." Kim Namil, *An Pyŏngmu p'yŏngjŏn*, 163.

24. Christian imagination is not completely absent in the biography. For an example, see Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Ŏnŭ ch'ŏngnyŏn nodongja ŭi sam kwa chugŭm*, 161.

25. Yi Sosŏn put a Bible near her dying son's head and prayed, and Chun Tae-il made his mother promise three times that she would continue the work he had started. Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Chŏn T'aeil chŏnjip*, 230–32; Manabe Yūko, *Resshi no tanjō*, 118. Over time Yi Sosŏn's own recollections began to include much more developed and embellished interaction between the mother and the son during the final moments. See Yi Sosŏn and Min Chongdŏk, *Ŏmŏni ŭi kil* [A mother's way].

26. Chang was publishing an underground newspaper of the College of Law, the *Chayu ŭi chong* (Liberty bell), which ran a story of the inhumane working conditions at the Peace Market a month before Chun's death. An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 208. At the time of Chun's self-immolation, the Student Social Development Corps (Haksaeng Sahoe Kaebaltan; Haksadan), established in 1968 by the KSCF, had five members working at the Peace Market in a program designed to make students experience lower-class people's lives. O Chaesik argues that it was at Chun's funeral that members of this progressive Christian student movement and student activists from Seoul National University's College of Law such as Chang, Cho Yŏngnae, and Ch'oe Chonggil met each other and began to work together. An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 210–11; and O Chaesik, *Na ege kkot ŭro tagaonŭn hyŏnjang*, 143–44.

27. Chang Kip'yo, in his postscript in Cho Yŏngnae, *Chŏn T'aeil p'yongjŏn*, calls the biography a "scripture" (*sŏngjŏn*) of the era and the "Chŏn T'aeil Gospel." Cho Yŏngnae, *Chŏn T'aeil p'yongjŏn* (2009 edition), 335. For him, Chun was the "Jesus of our era." Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 222. Chang was, however, a Buddhist like Cho Yŏngnae, a fact that suggests a commonality between the two (Christian and Buddhist) religiously-informed readings of Chun's sacrificial death.

28. See Yi Sosŏn and Min Chongdŏk, *Ŏmŏni ŭi kil*; O Toyŏp, *Chigyŏptorok komaun saramdŭra: Yi Sosŏn yŏdŭn ŭi kiŏk* [You people have been so good to me for so long: Yi Sosŏn's memories during eighty years of life]; and An Chaesŏng, *Ch'ŏnggye, nae ch'ŏngch'un*.

29. Sin Pyŏnghyŏn, "Minju nojo undong ŭi Chŏn T'aeil aedo wa chaehyŏn" [The rituals of condolence and discursive representations of Chun Tae-il's death in the Korean democratic union movement], 14–15. Sin sees these subjectivities of the democratic labor movement as "a type of worker intellect."

30. Based on her understanding of the particular nature of Korean Christianity Manabe explains the reception of Chun's death by his mother and others. She convincingly analyzes the cultural, social, religious, and political context in which a strongly

Christian narrative of Chun Tae-il's martyrdom developed over the 1970s and 1980s. Manabe Yūko, *Resshi no tanjō*, 51, 73–74, 103, 111, 117–18, and 342. She argues that the problem of suicide was glossed over by Korean Christian intellectuals because of the unique qualities of Korean Protestantism. Korean Protestantism is steeped in native shamanistic culture, in which *wŏnhon*, the sorrowful spirits of those who died an unjust death, and their *han*, accumulated grievances and insuppressible desires for correcting these wrongs, occupy a central place. Manabe emphasizes the continuing power of a Korean "root paradigm" that sees the world as composed of the good and the evil, and prescribes a *hanp'uri*, the releasing of *han* (*haewŏn*), performed by the living. The *hanp'uri* then elevates the dead, the *wŏnhon*, to the status of martyr-heroes, allowing the dead to achieve the cathartic, happy ending of resurrection.

31. Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Chŏn T'aeil chŏnjip*, 149–54. The quoted phrase is on page 149.

32. Ibid., 154.

33. For an example, see Chang Kip'yo's postscript (*palmun*) in Cho Yŏngnae, *Chŏn T'aeil p'yŏngjŏn* (1991 edition), 298.

34. Yi Sosŏn and Min Chongdŏk, *Ŏmŏni ŭi kil*, 18; and Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Ŏnŭ ch'ŏngnyŏn nodongja ŭi sam kwa chugŭm*, 18–19, 135, and 224; Korea Broadcasting Station (KBS), "Kkŏjiji annŭn pulkkot, Chŏn T'aeil" [A flame that cannot be extinguished, Chun Tae-il].

35. Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Ŏnŭ ch'ŏngnyŏn nodongja ŭi sam kwa chugŭm*, 224.

36. KBS, "Kkŏjiji annŭn pulkkot, Chŏn T'aeil."

37. Cho Yŏngnae, *Chŏn T'aeil p'yŏngjŏn* (2009 edition), 143.

38. Hwasook Nam, *Building Ships, Building a Nation*.

39. Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Chŏn T'aeil chŏnjip*, 149 and 154.

40. For examples of this expression see the union leaflets and statements collected in Minju Hŏnpŏp Chaengch'wi Kungmin Undong Pusan Ponbu Nodong Munje T'ŭkpyŏl Taech'aek Wiwŏnhoe [Special task force for the labor issues, Pusan branch of the citizen's movement to attain democratic constitution], ed., *Chanŏp ŏmnŭn sesang e salgo sipta: Pusan chiyŏk 7,8-wŏl nodongja t'ujaeng charyojip* [We want to live in a world without overtime work: Materials on July–August labor struggles in the Pusan region].

41. On the nature of and debates behind economic clauses of the founding Constitution, see Pak Myŏngnim, "Han'guk ŭi ch'ogi hŏnjŏng ch'eje wa minjujuŭi" [The early constitutional system and democracy in South Korea], 122–25.

42. Yi Hŭngjae, "Kŭllo kijunpŏp chejŏng simŭi ŭi chuyo chaengchŏm" [Key issues in the legislative debates on the Labor Standards Act]; Hwasook Nam, *Building Ships, Building a Nation*.

43. Hwasook Nam, *Building Ships, Building a Nation*.

44. Ibid.

45. Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Ŏnŭ ch'ŏngnyŏn nodongja ŭi sam kwa chugŭm*, 223–24; and An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 203–5. Cho describes the Labor Standards Act as "merely a piece of paper" or "a wild apricot that looks delicious" (*pit choŭn kaesalgu*; meaning appearance is deceptive) that is used by the government, which demands the blood and sweat from workers and collects taxes from citizens, in order to create a facade that "it does its utmost to protect workers' rights."

46. Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Ŏnŭ ch'ŏngnyŏn nodongja ŭi sam kwa chugŭm*, 223.

47. Hwasook Nam, "Shipyard Women and the Politics of Gender."

48. Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Ŏnŭ ch'ŏngnyŏn nodongja ŭi sam kwa chugŭm*, 179.

49. Pak Hyŏnch'ae participated in the writing of *Kim Taejung ssi ŭi taejung kyŏngje 100-mun 100-tap* [Mr. Kim Dae Jung's mass economy: One hundred questions and one hundred answers], which presented the economic platform of the oppositional party presidential candidate Kim at the 1971 election, right after the Chun Tae-il incident. Utilizing the fact that Kim's first name "Dae Jung" and the "masses" share the same pronunciation, this pamphlet proposed building a bold new economic system "by the masses, for the masses, and of the masses." The ideas proposed in the booklet became the basis of the theory of the *minjok* economy that Pak Hyŏnch'ae developed over the 1980s. Kim Samung, *Pak Hyŏnch'ae p'yŏngjŏn* [A critical biography of Pak Hyŏnch'ae], 89–93.

50. Political scientist Kim Pohyŏn argues that the "new perspective" of dissident elites, which emerged over the 1970s after the Chun Tae-il incident and the Kwangju (Kyŏnggi Province) Residents' "Riot" incident in 1971, did not represent "a great transformation in conception or in practice" because it did not question "capitalist relations" nor "the particular system of developmentalism," while attempting to overcome the problems of "immorality=violation of the procedural ethics" that some members of the power bloc exhibited. Kim Pohyŏn, "Pak Chŏnghŭi chŏngkwŏn'gi chŏhang ellit'ŭdŭl ŭi ijungsŏng kwa yŏksŏl" [Two-sidedness and paradox of opposition elites in the Park Chung Hee regime period], 174–75.

51. Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Chŏn T'aeil chŏnjip*, 136–39.

52. Ibid., 138.

53. According to An Kyŏnghwan, the student movement at Seoul National University in the 1960s was led by activist circles at the College of Law and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. As key activists from the Arts and Sciences were rounded up in the "6.3 Incident" of 1964, a massive student protest movement against the South Korea-Japan normalization treaty negotiations, and the Minjokchuŭi Pigyo Yŏn'guhoe (Society for comparative research of nationalisms; Minbiryŏn) Incident, "from about 1965 the

College of Law at Seoul National University played the central role in South Korea's student movement, and at the pivot of that College of Law [student movement] stood Cho Yŏngnae." An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 100–108.

54. Kim Chiha stated in his *Tonga ilbo* article of February 17, 1991, that the "Declaration of Conscience" is "clearly not what I wrote, but the work of the late Cho Yŏngnae." Pak Wŏnsun, "'Inkwŏn pyŏnhosa ŭi chŏnsŏl,' Cho Yŏngnae pyŏnhosa," 420–21.

55. KBS, "Chinsil ŭn kamok e kadul su ŏpta, Cho Yŏngnae."

56. Pak Wŏnsun, "'Inkwŏn pyŏnhosa ŭi chŏnsŏl,' Cho Yŏngnae pyŏnhosa."

57. An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 125. Political scientist Kim Wŏn, who deconstructs the hegemonic narrative of the democratic labor movement in his massive book *Yŏgong 1970*, describes Cho's narrative as a discourse of "humanism," which centers around related discourses of "protect the factory girls" and "(abolish) the attics." The points Kim makes in problematizing the hegemonic *minju* (democratic) labor movement discourse, including the view of the *minjung* as not-yet-awakened people and its gender-blindness, resonate with my argument in this essay. See Kim Wŏn, *Yŏgong 1970 kŭnyŏdŭl ŭi pan yŏksa*, 97–104.

58. An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 100–103.

59. Small groups of college students, at Seoul National University and Korea University in particular, were by the late 1960s beginning to regard the labor movement as a crucial site of struggle against the Park regime, and preparing to plunge themselves into labor activism. On the cases of intellectuals choosing to enter the FKTU, see Yu Kyŏngsun, "Haksaeng undonggadŭl ŭi nodong undong ch'amyŏ yangsang kwa yŏnghyang," 83–85. Apparently Cho was not affected by this new, and rather isolated, trend in student activism.

60. Kim Pohyŏn, "Pak Chŏnghŭi chŏngkwŏn'gi chŏhang ellit'ŭdŭl ŭi ijungsŏng kwa yŏksŏl."

61. Examples of the Korean news media's use of the trope of "young lions" (*chŏlmŭn sajadŭl*) to reference university students who participated in the April Revolution of 1960 are numerous. For example, an internet search through Naver.com's Newslibrary site yields seventy-two articles containing this use of the term in the short period from April to the end of the year 1960 from two major newspapers (*Kyŏnghyang sinmun* and *Tonga ilbo*).

62. Yu Kyŏngsun, "Chaengchŏm ŭro ponŭn 1970-86-yŏn nodong undongsa," 233–36. Sin Pyŏnghyŏn similarly argues that Chun's death was an event that allowed the image of the proletariat to come into the full view of the public for the first time, and this radically changed the "perceptual landscape" of South Korean society. Sin Pyŏnghyŏn, "Minju nojo undong ŭi Chŏn T'aeil aedo wa chaehyŏn," 8.

63. This notion of the plurality of "Chun Tae-il" (*Chŏn T'aeildŭl*) appears over the 1990s as the "Chun Tae-il spirit" was exalted in the labor movement and commemoration work for Chun gained momentum.

64. An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 126–28, 132–33, and 138.

65. Ibid., 130–31.

66. Ibid., 139–41.

67. Ibid., 141–42.

68. Ibid., 143.

69. Pak Hyŏngmin, "Kŭdŭl ŭn chugŭm ŭl t'onghae muŏt ŭl malhagoja haennŭn'ga?" [What did they want to say through death?]; and Ch'ŏn Chŏnghwan, *Chasallon: Kot'ong kwa haesŏk sai esŏ* [On suicide: Between pain and interpretation].

70. The phrase "dying to tell" is from Jennifer Robertson, "Dying to Tell."

71. For examples, see Tahar Ben Jelleoun, *By Fire: Writings on the Arab Spring*; and Shelly Culbertson, *The Fires of Spring*.

72. James A. Ben, *Burning for the Buddha*; Sallie B. King, "They Who Burned Themselves for Peace"; B. C. Ben Park, "Sociopolitical Contexts of Self-Immolation in Vietnam and South Korea"; and Margaret Gouin, "Self-Immolation and Martyrdom in Tibet."

73. Cho, as Manabe argues, also tried to slip in nationalist elements in the biography, and this tendency only increased in later accounts, including ones produced by Chun's mother and by the Cheonggye Garment Union. Often emphasized were Yi Sosŏn's background and an anti-Japanese stance she developed during the Colonial Period, especially the facts that her father was executed as an independence movement activist and that Yi herself was conscripted into the *Chŏngsindae*, a supposedly "volunteer corps" of Koreans the Japanese colonial government in Korea mobilized for the war effort. Manabe Yūko, *Resshi no tanjō*, 127–28.

74. Sin Pyŏnghyŏn. "Minju nojo undong ŭi Chŏn T'aeil aedo wa chaehyŏn," 20–32.

75. Sociologist Kim Chaeŭn argues that three major subject–positions became central in the symbolic politics of the democracy movement over the 1980s: a "martyr" (*yŏlsa*), a "warrior" (*chŏnsa*), and an activist "mother." She points out that in this familial rhetoric of the resistance movement the "martyr" and the "warrior," both imagined as male, were the main protagonists with political charisma, and the "mother" was a supporting actor at most. And there was no place at all for daughters. Kim Chaeŭn, "Minjuhwa undong kwajŏng esŏ kusŏngdoen chuch'e wich'i ŭi 'sŏngbyŏlhwa' e kwanhan yŏn'gu, 55.

76. An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 230–31; An Chaesŏng, *Ch'ŏnggye, nae ch'ŏngch'un*, 459.

77. KBS, "Chinsil ŭn kamok e kadul su ŏpta, Cho Yŏngnae." Also see the new preface by the editorial committee titled "Kaejŏngp'an ŭl naemyŏnsŏ" [Publishing a revised edition], in Cho Yŏngnae, *Chŏn T'aeil p'yŏngjŏn* (1991 edition).

78. The ritual was performed in early December of 1990, based on the list of several dozen martyrs by self-immolation Min Chongdŏk had prepared. An Kyŏnghwan, *Cho Yŏngnae p'yŏngjŏn*, 436–37.

79. Hwasook Nam, *Building Ships, Building a Nation*.

80. On progressive activist groups that were sending members to individual unions to help activate labor struggle at major industrial sites, see Hwasook Nam, "Progressives and Labor under Park Chung Hee," 885–87.

81. Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan Kŏllip Wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Chŏn T'aeil chŏnjip*, 220.

82. Cho Yŏngnae, *Chŏn T'aeil p'yŏngjŏn*, 290–91.

83. See Pak Hyŏnch'ae, "Han'guk nodong undong ŭi hyŏnhwang kwa tangmyŏn kwaje: 70-yŏndae rŭl chungsim ŭro" [The current situation and urgent tasks of the Korean labor movement: Focusing on the 1970s]; and Pak Hyŏnch'ae, "Minjung kwa kyŏngje" [The minjung and the economy]. Also see Pak Hyŏnch'ae, "Haebang hu Han'guk nodong undong ŭi paljach'wi" [The course the Korean labor movement has taken since the liberation]; Pak Hyŏnch'ae, "4.19 sigi nodong undong ŭi chŏn'gae wa yangsang" [The development and conditions of the labor movement during the 4.19 period]; and Pak Hyŏnch'ae, "1970-yŏndae ŭi nodongja nongmin undong" [The labor and farmers' movement in the 1970s] on Pak's view in the mid-1980s regarding the state of the South Korean labor movement. In his 1978 book *Minjung kwa kyŏngje* (Minjung and the economy) Pak traces the gradual empowerment of working-class people and concludes that "the more active and autonomous (*chuch'ejŏk*) segment of the minjung is being materialized" since the time of the April 1960 Revolution and "reaching a new level of consciousness" in South Korea. Kim Samung, *Pak Hyŏnch'ae p'yŏngjŏn*, 116–17. From his understanding of the potential of and actual progress made by the working class, Pak Hyŏnch'ae was critical of workers' taking extreme measures such as suicide as a means of protest. Pak Hyŏnch'ae, "Han'guk nodong undong ŭi hyŏnhwang kwa tangmyŏn kwaje: 70-yŏndae rŭl chungsim ŭro," 370.

84. Manabe Yūko, *Resshi no tanjō*, 68.

85. For recollections of Peace Market female garment workers, see Yu Kyŏngsun, ed., *Na, yŏsŏng nodongja I* [I, a female worker, Vol. 1]; Sin Sunae, *Yŏl sesal yŏgong ŭi sam*; and An Chaesŏng, *Ch'ŏnggye, nae ch'ŏngch'un*. In a rare episode that hints at women workers' views of Chun's sacrifice, Im Migyŏng, a nineteen-year-old assistant machine operator, attempted to commit suicide in a desperate struggle in 1977, saying, "Since a man [Chun Tae-il] sacrificed his life at the Peace Market, the second Chun Tae-il should be a woman." Yi Sosŏn and Min Chongdŏk, *Ŏmŏni ŭi kil*, 331. On tensions and the conflict between male and female unionists see An Chaesŏng, *Ch'ŏnggye, nae ch'ŏngch'un*, 240, 354–55, and 452–53. There was a previous attempt at union organizing in 1967, about which not much is known. Ibid., 73.

86. See Kwŏn Myŏnga, *Kajok iyagi nŭn ŏttŏk'e mandŭrŏjinŭn'ga* [How is a familial story being created]; and Chu Ch'anggyu, *Singminji kŭndaesŏng kwa Han'guk yŏnghwa* [Colonial modernity and Korean cinema]. Hunt argues that the "family romance," that is, "the collective, unconscious images of the familial order that underlie revolutionary politics" is important in understanding eighteenth-century France "because it brings previously overlooked evidence into clearer focus and because it raises important questions about the meanings of modern politics." Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, xiii–xiv. This "familial imagery" or thinking in "familial grid" seems to be useful in imagining the Korean youth and dissident cultures of the 1960s and 1970s. In some sense these South Koreans were like the French who "had to tell stories about how the republic came to be and what it meant" and who "in a sense did wish to get free from the political parents of whom they had developed a low opinion" and "imagined replacing them . . . with a different kind of family, one in which the parents were effaced and the children, especially the brothers, acted autonomously." Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, xiv–xv.

87. Here I am following an argument persuasively developed by Kim Chaeŭn in her study of the process of gendered subjectification in the 1980s student movement. Kim Chaeŭn, "Minjuhwa undong kwajŏng esŏ kusŏngdoen chuch'e wich'i ŭi 'sŏngbyŏlhwa' e kwanhan yŏn'gu."

88. For male worker activists the biography might have resonated in a different way compared to intellectual readers and female readers. Male worker subjectivity and positionality in the minjung movement vis-à-vis intellectual activists and female workers is an important topic of inquiry, which awaits further study.

89. An Chaesŏng, *Ch'ŏnggye, nae ch'ŏngch'un*, 33.

8

The Construction of Martyrdom and Self-Immolation in South Korea

SUN-CHUL KIM

Sacrificial, or suicidal, acts of protest have always been an integral part of popular contention in South Korea. People have stabbed, hanged, poisoned themselves, leaped off high buildings, and set themselves on fire in order to make a political statement. These extreme political tactics have often provided the symbolic resources for reinvigorating social movement activities at various junctures and have been recognized as heroic acts by the activist community and the broader society. Among the various forms of suicidal acts of protest, self-immolation, or setting oneself on fire in protest, has stood out as one of the most frequently used protest forms and one that best exemplifies martyrdom in the South Korean imagination of popular protest.

At the heart of South Korea's narrative of martyrdom is Chun Tae-il, a textile worker who set himself on fire in protest of dire working conditions in November 1970. Chun had realized that the labor practices of the day diverged greatly from the labor rights enshrined in the South Korean Labor Standards Act. After making numerous failed attempts to rectify the problems through institutional channels, such as knocking on the doors of government offices or making formal petitions, Chun Tae-il set himself on fire in the Peace Market, the sweatshop district in the Tongdaemun (East Gate) area of Seoul. As his flesh was engulfed in flames, he shouted, "We are not machines!" "Allow us to rest on Sundays!" "Abide by the Labor Standards Act!" In his hands was a copy of the Labor Standards Act.

Ever since this event, Chun Tae-il's self-immolation has been remembered as a watershed moment in the history of South Korea's popular contention. Sociologist and labor historian Hagen Koo portrays Chun's self-immolation as a "heroic act [that] portended the arrival of a new era in the Korean labor

movement," while Paul Chang similarly notes that the "narrative of Korea's modern-day labor movement begins with the life and death of Chon T'aeil."[1] The impact of Chun's death was not limited to the labor movement. As historian Namhee Lee relates, "If Che Guevara stirred the souls of middle-class European and American college students in the 1960s, Chun Tae-il and his death stirred the souls of thousands of Korean students and workers, eventually pushing them into the streets and factories."[2] The socio-cultural significance of his martyrdom has grown so large in South Korea that in 2012 the then conservative candidate and former president, Park Geun-hye (Pak Kŭnhye, 2013–17), was compelled to pay homage to Chun Tae-il during her presidential campaign to curry favor with workers, despite protest from labor activists.[3]

The case of Chun Tae-il is not unique in itself. The Vietnamese monk Thich Quang Duc's famous public performance in 1963 introduced self-immolation as a powerful political weapon in many parts of the world.[4] In 1965 alone, for example, at least three cases of self-immolation occurred in the United States in protest of the Vietnam War.[5] In the wake of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in January 1969, Charles University student Jan Palach self-immolated, urging his compatriots to emerge out of despair. Seven more self-immolations followed.[6] However, these were largely isolated events. While the self-immolators were honored in one way or another, commemoration of their martyrdom was limited to relatively narrow social circles. Neither did self-immolation take off as a widely used political tactic in these countries. What makes the case of Chun Tae-il stand out is how his self-immolation became raw material for a narrative of martyrdom that inspired a whole generation of activists and became a harbinger of many more self-immolations that followed.

In this chapter, I look into the link between South Korea's history of popular contention and shared understanding of martyrdom to examine how self-immolation has settled as an enduring tactic in South Korea. After examining the history of self-immolation and discussing its cultural significance, I locate acts of self-immolation within the context of the *minjung* movement as well as social groups formed to commemorate martyrs, as their needs evolved in interaction with the state over time. In the process, I focus on how past struggles were remembered, and how martyrdom became a powerful cultural symbol around which to organize the narratives and memories of the struggle. The construction of meaning, centered on how stories of martyrdom

were told, first took place within activist circles and later spread to the broader public as the martyrdom narrative became mainstreamed. I propose that examining the ways in which survivors responded to and gave meaning to self-immolation and martyrdom in the context of struggle holds the key to better understanding how self-immolation has become ubiquitous in the imagination and practice of protest in contemporary South Korea.

This chapter draws on various sources, including newspaper coverage of events, online content, as well as secondary sources. Unless otherwise specified, the accounts of individual martyrs or self-immolation events draw on information gathered from the homepage of the Council for the Commemoration of National Democratic Martyrs (CCNDM), an umbrella organization of nearly 150 groups whose goal is to commemorate and "inherit the spirit of martyrs" who had fallen in the fight for "independence, democracy, and reunification."[7] The definition and use of the terms "martyr" and "martyrdom" are "closely tied to the group that shares the belief of the one who dies," and therefore will always remain controversial as long as other groups do not share the same beliefs.[8] Nonetheless, I use "martyr" and "martyrdom" in the same way used by the social groups I examine in the hopes that it will help readers better follow the flow of meaning from the groups' internal logic.

SELF-IMMOLATION IN SOUTH KOREA: AN OVERVIEW

While many take for granted that Chun Tae-il was the first to use self-immolation as a means of protest, this was not the case. On December 11, 1963, former army colonel and disabled Korean War veteran Kim Kihyŏn set himself ablaze inside a public park near downtown Seoul. He left a petition letter (*t'anwŏnsŏ*) addressed to Park Chung Hee (Pak Chŏnghui), the chairman of the military junta termed the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction, in which he asked Park Chung Hee to be allowed to immigrate to Brazil with his family and to use an abandoned lot of land in the outskirts of Seoul.[9] While this event was first thought of as an act of protest against General Park, as the *New York Times* relays, the authorities announced that Kim Kihyŏn "killed himself because of his economic difficulties."[10]

If the reasoning behind Kim Kihyŏn's suicide by fire appeared ambivalent regarding his political intention, the two self-immolations that followed in

1964 and 1965 had every indication of being politically motivated. On April 1, 1964, amidst a rising tide of protest against the government's policy to establish normal relations with Japan, Korea's former colonizer, a man in his thirties, Yi Chongnae, poured gasoline and lit himself on fire in front of the city hall of Taegu, shouting "Long live the Republic of Korea" and "I die for justice." The local *Yŏngnam ilbo* cited an "unverified rumor" that he shouted slogans in opposition to the "humiliating diplomacy" (*kuryok oegyo*), an oft-used phrase criticizing the Park Chung Hee government's normalization policy.[11] But the treaty was signed by the two governments in the following year and Hŏ Sik, a former anti-Japanese independence fighter and politician, set himself on fire on the steps of the National Assembly in protest. He had left a message to his party members proclaiming he would "make known the righteous indignation of his fellow comrades against the normalization treaty through immolating [his] own body."[12] In a letter he had also sent to the *Han'guk ilbo* two days before his self-immolation, he apologized for having failed to prevent the normalization treaty as a politician and "urged to his death that the government and the parliament cancel the treaty."[13]

These three instances of self-immolation were no less dramatic than Chun Tae-il's self-immolation. Nor did they go unnoticed at the time of the events. In particular, Hŏ Sik's self-immolation was referenced the next day on *Kobau yŏnggam*, the iconic 4-frame satirical comic strip carried by one of the leading daily newspapers, *Tonga ilbo*, which indicates the significant amount of public attention it must have attracted. Moreover, his funeral procession was violently broken up by the riot police, resulting in the arrest of a "hundred or so marchers."[14] It was not as if Hŏ Sik was a lone individual or that his death was an isolated event either. As the *New York Times* coverage of the public funeral referenced, Hŏ's self-immolation grew out of a context in which "[g]roups of opposition politicians, students, professors, retired generals, writers, and others have been campaigning against the treaty, which they charge contains 'humiliating' concessions to Japan."[15]

The fact that it was Chun Tae-il, and not Kim Kihyŏn, Yi Chongnae, or Hŏ Sik, who is remembered as the path-breaking self-immolator and martyr, suggests that not all self-immolations are equal in the memory of South Koreans. If Chun Tae-il continues to be remembered as the progenitor of self-immolation, it implies that a selection process has reflected the varying degrees of meaning survivors gave to each self-immolation. The presence of

a meaning-making process finds further support in the patterns of self-immolation over time.

Despite its introduction as a protest tactic by Chun Tae-il and his predecessors, self-immolation, or other forms of protest suicide, was rarely used during the most oppressive political conditions of the 1970s and early 1980s. Instead, there were noticeably more self-immolations toward the mid- and late-1980s. Only one protest suicide occurred throughout the notoriously repressive Yusin system (1972–79), in April 1975, when Kim Sangjin, a Seoul National University student, stabbed his stomach during an anti-Yusin campus rally. The first self-immolation since Chun Tae-il took place in June 1980 by Kim Chongt'ae, a worker who set himself on fire calling for the guarantee of labor rights and an investigation of the Kwangju killings. The next instance of self-immolation, according to the CCNDM, occurred in 1984 by another worker who protested the repression of union activities. In 1985, there were two student self-immolations. In 1986, seven protesters set themselves on fire, after which self-immolation came to be used consistently as a means of protest. The peak came in 1991 when a chain of eleven self-immolations erupted during the six weeks of mass protest that followed the police killing of a student protester, Kang Kyŏngdae. As Hyojoung Kim summarized, "[t]he majority of suicide protests took place during the late 1980s and 1990s."[16]

This was not a mere coincidence. The mid-1980s was a period when the pro-democracy movement was growing. This had much to do with the liberalization measures taken by the authoritarian regime in anticipation of the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Partial autonomy was allowed on college campuses and hundreds of banned politicians were allowed to return to politics. The electoral success of the pro-democracy opposition party in the February 1985 general elections further energized the growing pro-democracy movement. With a national campaign to collect ten million signatures to press for constitutional revision led by the New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP) in February 1986, South Korea was entering a tumultuous period of political showdown between the pro-democracy opposition and the authoritarian powerholders. The pro-democracy movement brought greater attention to injustice in South Korean society as well as a stronger imperative to overcome it. The rising expectations for political change strengthened the conviction within the activist communities that one's action could actually lead to social change.[17] And it was in this context of change that self-immolation was redis-

covered as a powerful weapon that could galvanize an army of (potential) activists. Each instance of self-immolation was proof of an injustice that needed to be rectified. The strong emotional responses it induced dramatized the sense of political urgency. This naturally led to more militant responses, further escalating the political conflict and the sense of political urgency, which called for more drastic action. In short, it was how committed activists subjectively perceived the world around them and attached meaning to their role amid rising tension that led to the proliferation of self-immolations in the mid- to late-1980s and early 1990s.

The minjung ideology provided an important ideational source in this regard. "Minjung," literally meaning the people or masses, represented a framework with which to reinterpret history through the lens of those who were politically oppressed and economically marginalized. The minjung ideology grew out of intellectual work to reinterpret Latin American liberation theology by adding a strong nationalist, class-based, and teleological analysis grounded in Korean reality.[18] Although the ideology dictated that the minjung, namely, workers, farmers, and the underprivileged, were the subject of history, the irony was that the concept itself was the product of intellectuals, with radical student activists serving as its largest consumer base. Subsequently, the highly politicized climate of the mid-1980s generated an urgent "need for intellectuals to actively insert themselves into the process of constructing the minjung's revolutionary subjectivity and the need to efface this active presence at the same time."[19] Self-immolation was the response of dedicated activists to this call of the minjung mission.[20]

By the mid-1990s, the minjung paradigm lost its might. This was, in part, due to the changes in the political environment. Elected as president in 1993, the former dissident, Kim Young-sam (Kim Yŏngsam, 1993–98), launched an energetic reform campaign from the top-down that caught the minjung movement off-guard. In 1995, a special law was enacted to prosecute the two former presidents, Chun Doo-hwan (Chŏn Tuhwan, 1980–88) and Roh Tae-woo (No T'aeu, 1988–93), on account of sedition and mass killings during the Kwangju Uprising, after which they were convicted of the crimes. Reflecting the changing climate, many activists sought new paths in the citizens movement.[21] However, this was already after self-immolation had become a political weapon to any activists hoping to use their own life to make a political statement. The numbers in the mid-1990s fell relative to

those of the late 1980s and early 1990s, but self-immolation continued to be used by political activists. In the spring of 1996, for example, three college students committed protest suicide by fire within a span of a month. In the 2000s, self-immolation by student activists became rare. Instead, more workers, mostly the irregularly employed, continued to use self-immolation as a way to express their frustration against the neoliberal labor policies. In January 2003, Pae Tarho, a worker and union member, self-immolated. In his death note, he called for the laid-off workers to be reinstated and criticized the court order to seize salaries of union workers for the damage caused by the workers' strike.[22] In October of the same year, two trade unionists self-immolated in three days against labor repression and discriminatory policies toward irregular workers.[23] In late October of 2007, another pair of self-immolations by irregular workers occurred with a four-day interval.[24]

While students and workers formed the majority of self-immolators, they were not alone. In September 2003, a farmer set himself on fire during a candlelight vigil in Sŏngju, North Kyŏngsang Province. The vigil was to commemorate the death of the farmer-activist Yi Kyŏnghae, who had stabbed himself to death a few days earlier in protest of neoliberal economic policies during a World Trade Organization (WTO) conference in Cancun, Mexico.[25] In November 2005, another farmer self-immolated in South Kyŏngsang Province amidst the ratification of a bill on rice imports.[26] Farmers had opposed the opening of the rice market for decades. Street vendors protesting government crackdowns and harassment were also among those who used self-immolation.[27] Also, anti-Japanese nationalist activists often found their political expression in this fiery method, as in several cases of self-immolation that protested Japan's claim to Tokto (J. Takeshima), an islet whose ownership is contested by both Korea and Japan.[28] Even ordinary South Koreans have occasionally resorted to this extreme act as a means of suicide to escape from desperation and despair.[29] It was clear that self-immolation had become an integral part of the culture of protest in South Korea.

SELF-IMMOLATION AS A CULTURAL FORM

The analysis in this chapter starts from the premise that self-immolation, as well as other forms of protest suicide, is a cultural form as much as it is political. By cultural, we mean the shared understanding of a people and their

representations in symbols, objects, and everyday practices that constrain, and therefore give shape to, human behavior as they emerge and are transformed through social interaction. Cultural forms, then, would refer to all the learned constructs, including the expectations, habits, skills, taken-for-granted mentalities and idioms, symbols and rituals, as well as gradually molded behavioral patterns that embody the shared understanding of a population.[30]

In the world of popular contention and social movements, the cultural forms of protest are manifested through contentious repertoires, that is, a limited set of action forms and means used in political struggles. According to Charles Tilly, contentious repertoires are cultural creations that help us understand "not only what people do when they make a claim" but also "what they know how to do and what society has come to expect them to choose to do."[31] In South Korea, people learn how to wear headbands, sit down in public spaces as they pump their arms in the air and shout slogans, march in columns, clash with the police, and set fire to themselves in protest. One does not have to be a protester in order to understand the meaning of these actions; even a first-time protester knows what to expect and what to do at a protest because these protest forms represent the shared cultural understandings and skills that have developed over time in South Korean society.

Contentious repertoires are not indefinite, and only a limited set of protest routines are available at any given time and space. While shaving heads may be a common protest form in South Korea, it is an alien act that may cause bewilderment in other places. Conversely, *cacerolazo*, or banging pots and pans in protest, a widespread protest form in Latin American and parts of Europe, does not find much use in South Korea. At the same time, contentious repertoires are never static; they evolve over time. The standard social movement repertoires we are now familiar with, for example, public assemblies, demonstrations, strikes, and petitions, were all modern inventions that gradually took root as the interests and strategies of the people adapted to the changing economic, social, and political contexts.[32]

This evolution of repertoires, however, was not an automatic process. Many inventions were made and tried out, but only a few survived. Some argue that a new protest method itself has to be versatile and appealing across temporal and cultural borders in order to spread and survive, as was the case with the barricade that originated from sixteenth-century France.[33] Others

contend the spread of a new protest repertoire depends on, among other things, whether a broad spectrum of people perceives it to be legitimate and effective.[34] These findings indicate the evolution of contentious repertoires and adoption of new protest methods are mediated by a cultural process through which people make sense of new practices, try them out, and accord meaning to them as they adapt to changing contexts.

The cultural nature underpinning contentious repertoires helps us to understand why the same act may not always be received in the same way across different cultures, regions, or social groups. In the case of self-immolation, it may carry enormous symbolism in one context, whereas in another it could be considered simply a different—irrational and extreme—way to kill oneself. If South Koreans are able to recognize an act of self-incineration as a political act of protest, it implies self-immolation has found a meaning in South Korea as a means of protest. Once someone burns themselves, it attracts considerable attention from the media and prompts relevant actors—the police, family, friends, or other social groups—to respond in expected ways.

Things can be different in other places, as in the United States where a number of self-immolations have taken place over the past few years. One of the most recent events took place in front of a New Jersey Veterans Affairs (VA) health clinic in March 2016, carried out by a fifty-one-year-old veteran.[35] Several years earlier in October 2013, a sixty-one-year-old Vietnam vet set himself on fire on the National Mall in Washington DC.[36] While the two events were separated in time, they hint at a shared motive. In both cases, it was the vets who set themselves on fire at a time when the VA's health care system was in a serious decay, forcing vets to wait months or even years to receive health care.[37] Their fiery acts were carried out in broad daylight in front of high-profile government institutions. Yet neither event drew serious attention from the public or the media. If there was any coverage, mental illness was implicated as a possible cause. The media seemed determined to expunge any political implication from the acts.[38] We may take this as an indication that in the United States there is a reluctance to see self-immolation as a legitimate protest form. We might further surmise that this has much to do with the absence of meaning construction over self-immolation. What is left is the simple act of suicide by self-burning.

One of the interesting aspects behind self-immolation's meaning-making process is the fact that its meaning is negotiated post-mortem, and that a gap

may exist between the original intention and how the survivors interpret the act. The media coverage of the two American vets shows how the meaning of their acts was defined as politically irrelevant in their absence. The opposite can also be true. A person may set himself on fire out of personal (read "not necessarily political") reasons but may happen to be heralded as a political martyr by his survivors. This seems to have been the case with Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor whose death in early 2011 is considered to have sparked the Arab Spring.

There is little evidence that shows his intention to spark a movement or to communicate a political message. To the contrary, all evidence shows his action was an emotional reaction to repeated harassment by local officials as he was trying to make a living by selling fruits from a handcart. On December 17, 2010, Bouazizi set himself on fire on the very street where he used to work. As a reporter from the *Foreign Policy* relays, "'[Mohamed Bouazizi] never even watched the news,' his mother told us. 'People like Mohamed are concerned with doing business. They don't understand anything about politics.'"[39] As his cousin speculates, "Perhaps he thought that he might be better off dead than living under such conditions [of constant harassment]."[40] Nonetheless, his survivors took his act as a political call to action, and that is how he has come to be remembered. His self-immolation prompted a chain of similar actions in the Arab world, triggering mass demonstrations that we now call the Arab Spring. A stone monument of Bouazizi's cart was erected later in 2013 to commemorate his martyrdom in the small rural town of Sid Bouzid where he died.

Intended or not, the self-immolation of the Tunisian street vendor triggered a chain of self-immolations throughout the Arab world.[41] Whether or not the Arabs will continue to use fire as a protest method, however, will depend on the extent to which they can build a shared understanding of self-immolation as a legitimate political act. This, in turn, will depend on how the story of self-immolation is told, for only when self-immolation acquires a positive meaning within a given population does it acquire legitimacy and effectiveness that makes it worthy of emulation.

A story that accords positive meaning to self-immolation is one that latches self-immolation onto an existing narrative of resistance and struggle. In this narrative, the past is invoked in order to inspire ongoing struggles and to give meaning and identity to the activist communities within which the

story is told.[42] And no such narrative is as powerful as one that is centered on martyrdom, an ultimate act of self-sacrifice made in the course of the promotion of a collective cause. A typical narrative of martyrdom is constructed around a protagonist and the injustices and sufferings that caused a person to stage the heroic act of self-sacrifice. It draws on the common experiences, observations, idioms, norms, and identities of the people in ways that make people easily empathize with the martyr and the injustices they suffered as the source of their own suffering. This way, the shared understanding of the historical meaning of martyrdom, how it relates to oneself, and what it accomplishes, becomes part of a socially mediated process in which reality is reframed and expectations remolded. Just like how Chun Tae-il's story inspired a whole generation of activists in South Korea, the narrative of martyrdom becomes the foundation of a collective action frame with which to understand the world, its problems, and how they can be overcome through concerted action.[43] In short, a narrative of martyrdom offers a "key to understanding how these acts gain popular support and become potential individual motivations."[44]

CALLING OUT THE MARTYRS

July 9, 1987 was a day when the nation came together to mourn the death of Yi Hanyŏl. Yi Hanyŏl was a Yonsei University student who served as a catalyst for the June Uprising that brought about South Korea's political transition. He had been in a state of coma since June 9, 1987, when he was hit in the head by a teargas canister fired by the riot police during a pro-democracy demonstration on campus. He died on July 5, a week after the authoritarian incumbents surrendered to popular pressure and issued an announcement promising democratic reforms on June 29, 1987. To mourn Yi Hanyŏl, nearly a million people packed the City Hall Plaza where the commemoration event was being held.[45] A giant portrait of Yi Hanyŏl led the funeral procession, followed by hundreds of banners paying tribute to the dead. The event proceeded solemnly as speaker after speaker offered their eulogies. After a few speakers, Reverend Mun Ikhwan, one of the leaders of the pro-democracy movement who himself had just been released from prison the day before, stood at the podium.[46] Instead of giving a speech, he started to call out the names of those who had died during the long pro-democracy movement.

"Martyr Chun Tae-il (Chŏn T'aeil yŏlsa yŏ)! Martyr Kim Sangjin (Kim Sangjin yŏlsa yŏ)! Martyr Chang Chunha (Chang Chunha yŏlsa yŏ)!" As he screamed out the names of twenty-six martyrs at the top of his lungs, Reverend Mun's voice broke from time to time, punctuated by sobs.[47] By the time Mun reached Yi Hanyŏl, the last of the twenty-six, he looked exhausted. The City Hall Plaza had turned into a sea of tears.

The sobering emotional impacts aside, the reverend's eulogy offered an interesting window through which to understand how the meaning of martyrdom took shape in the wake of the June Uprising. For the first time in public, Reverend Mun had placed martyrdom at the center of South Korea's pro-democracy struggle by calling out the names of the martyrs. His tribute went beyond the plain statement that South Korea's newly won democracy would not have been possible had it not been for those who made the sacrifices. It was a powerful declaration that refused to see the deaths as mere accidents or unfortunate events in the course of the anti-authoritarian struggle. He was claiming that all of the deaths took place with a purpose. They were the main engines of democratization. And the dramatic success of the June Uprising served as a perfect denouement to the narrative of a long suffering overcome through martyrdom. Subsequently, martyrdom came to acquire the moral authority that would forever be associated with South Korea's democratic progress. The June Uprising or any post-authoritarian social movement that tracks back its lineage to the pro-democracy movement of the 1980s became unthinkable without the narrative of martyrdom.

At the same time, the list of martyrs Reverend Mun called out constituted a narrative of its own, presenting a story of the South Korean pro-democracy movement through a genealogy of martyrdom. It was a story of struggle that started with Chun Tae-il's self-immolation in 1970 and ended with Yi Hanyŏl in 1987, bridged by the sacrifices of the "2000 Kwangju spirits" (Kwangju 2000-*yŏ yŏngnyŏng*).[48] Table 8.1 lists the names of the martyrs in the order shouted out by Mun. The names did not follow a chronological order, but they clearly presented a history of struggle whose goals encompassed labor rights, justice to the killings of Kwangju, and full sovereignty from US influence in South Korean affairs, in addition to calls to end authoritarian rule and bring democracy. The list did not represent all who had died in the course of the pro-democracy struggle during the 1970s and 80s and excluded those who died in protest before 1970, the year when Chun Tae-il self-immolated.[49]

Table 8.1. List of Martyrs in Mun Ikhwan's Eulogy

Name	Year	Occupation	Cause of Death	Cause or Demand
Chun Tae-il	1970	Worker	Fire	Labor rights
Kim Sangjin	1975	Student	Stabbing	Democracy
Chang Chunha	1975	Dissident leader	Suspicious death	Democracy
Kim T'aehun	1981	Student	Leaping	Democracy
Hwang Chŏngha	1983	Student	Police repression	Democracy
Kim Ŭigŭi	1980	Student	Leaping	Kwangju/democracy
Kim Sejin	1986	Student	Fire	Anti-US
Yi Chaeho	1986	Student	Fire	Anti-US
Yi Tongsu	1986	Student	Fire	Democracy
Kim Kyŏngsuk	1979	Worker	Police repression	Labor rights
Chin Sŏngil	1986	Student	Fire	Democracy
Kang Sangch'ŏl	1986	Activist	Fire	Kwangju/democracy
Song Kwangyŏng	1985	Student	Fire	Kwangju/minjung rights
Pak Yŏngjin	1986	Worker	Fire	Labor rights
Kwangju 2000-yŏ yŏngnyŏng	1980	Unspecified	Military repression	Democracy
Pak Yŏngdu	1984	Other	Suspicious death	Human rights
Kim Chongt'ae	1980	Worker	Fire	Kwangju/labor rights
Pak Hyejŏng	1986	Student	Leaping	Democracy
P'yo Chŏngdu	1987	Student	Fire	Kwangju/democracy
Hwangbo Yŏngguk	1987	Worker	Fire	Kwangju/democracy
Pak Chongman	1984	Worker	Fire	Labor rights
Hong Kiil	1985	Worker	Fire	Kwangju/democracy
Pak Chongch'ŏl	1987	Student	Torture	Democracy/labor rights
U Chongwŏn	1985	Student	Suspicious death	Democracy
Kim Yonggwŏn	1987	Student	Suspicious death	Democracy
Yi Hanyŏl	1987	Student	Police repression	Democracy

Source: "Yi Hanyŏl yŏlsa yŏnggyŏlsik chung Mun Ikhwan moksa ŭi yŏnggyŏlsa "yŏlsa yŏ" ["Dear Martyr," Reverend Mun Ikhwan's eulogy in Martyr Yi Hanyŏl's funeral]. *Korea Democracy Foundation Open Archives*. Accessed June 22, 2016. https://openarchives.culturalspot.org/asset-viewer/이한열-열사-영결식-중-문익환-목사의-영결사-열사여/kAFsZHeYfC6ncA?hl=ko.

However, narrowing the boundaries gave coherence to an otherwise untidy list of political deaths and offered a sense of identity to a social movement that was going through a critical phase of transition. The social movement, represented by the names of martyrs, was the minjung movement whose political goals—despite the promise of general elections and political reforms offered by the authoritarian incumbent—were yet to be addressed. The mobilization of the minjung movement continued into post-1987 South Korea with greater force.[50] Naturally, the levels of political violence remained high, which resulted in an even greater number of self-immolations and martyrs in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Another notable feature was the broad scope of martyrs Mun included in his eulogy. The various deaths martyrs were associated with can be observed in table 8.1. The majority of the martyrs died in self-sacrificial acts: thirteen from self-immolation, three from leaping, and one from stabbing. Among them was Pak Hyejŏng, a Seoul National University student who threw herself into the Han River from the Hannam Bridge in 1986. In her suicide note, she agonized over her weakness and halfway commitment that resulted in her inability to act in accordance with her political ideals. "I cannot stand my guilt and indebtedness any longer," she wrote.[51] Her decision to kill herself cannot be separated from the turbulent political climate and the burning sense of political urgency that charged the activist community in the late 1980s. However, there is little doubt Pak's action was triggered by a personal motive, which comes in stark contrast to other martyrs who took their lives to expose injustice and make passionate calls for political action. Nonetheless, she was called out as a martyr and has been remembered as such.

The martyrs included not only those who took their own lives for a collective cause but also those who died without deadly intention. Many deaths, including those who perished during the Kwangju pro-democracy movement, were apparently caused by state violence. Also included among the martyrs were four cases of suspicious deaths (*ŭimunsa*), or deaths whose causes were contested. The death of Chang Chunha, a former independence fighter and leading anti-Yusin dissident, deemed by many as Park Chung Hee's nemesis, was attributed by the authorities to an accidental fall off a cliff. U Chongwŏn's dead body was discovered on a railroad after being sought after by the police for his political activities, and Kim Yonggwŏn's mysterious death while he was serving in the military was declared a suicide. And then there was Pak

Yŏngdu, who was labeled a thug (*pullyangbae*) and arrested during Chun Doohwan's "social purification (*sahoe chŏnghwa*) campaign" in 1980. He served in the notorious Samch'ŏng Educational Camp after which he was sentenced to two years of protective custody in Ch'ŏngsong Prison, where he was killed by the hands of the correction officers who tortured him after he led an inmate protest calling for the end of routine beatings of inmates.[52]

The idea of martyrdom is a cultural construct that depends on the meaning accorded by members of a society or a group.[53] The meaning of martyrdom, in turn, is constructed in ways "tailored to the needs and concerns of local populations."[54] While martyrdom usually focuses on the heroic act of sacrifice in pursuit of a collective cause, Reverend Mun's eulogy revealed that the victims of authoritarian state violence were also considered martyrs. In fact, martyrdom was defined broadly in terms of the consequences of authoritarian rule as much as it was defined by the act of purposeful self-sacrifice in South Korea. This overlap of heroism and victimhood in the construction of martyrdom served important purposes for the minjung movement. On the one hand, it accentuated the violent nature of the political system and amplified the sense of injustice, thereby bolstering the political legitimacy of the movement that purported to overcome such injustice. On the other hand, defining martyrdom broadly to include victims of state violence resulted in a long list of martyrs, all of whom had to be remembered properly. Naturally, the number of memorial societies, days of remembrance, and commemoration services proliferated. This, we will see, provided a critical mechanism through which martyrs came to be remembered and their stories told in South Korea.

REMEMBERING THE MARTYRS

The June Uprising in 1987 was a half victory. Before the nation could fully rejoice the promise of democratic reforms and breathe a sigh a relief, a new wave of labor protests calling for better wages and independent unions erupted. While the hopes for democracy were shattered by the victory of the authoritarian incumbent Roh Tae-woo in the December presidential election, the National Assembly elections held early the next year in 1988 diminished the ruling party to a parliamentary minority. To overcome the political stalemate, the ruling party engineered a secretive, three-party merger with two opposition parties in January 1990. This resulted in a new ruling party, the

Democratic Liberal Party, which often bypassed parliamentary consultation based on more than two-thirds of its National Assembly seats. There was progress in basic rights and general elections were instituted, but South Korea was still overshadowed by lingering authoritarian politics. This provided fertile ground for the minjung movement to regroup, and martyrdom continued to provide the symbolic resources to the movement. In the process, numerous commemoration societies of martyrs (*ch'umo saŏphoe* or *kinyŏm saŏphoe*) emerged as the key agents that played instrumental roles.

Most commemoration societies were informal groups of close friends and family that were formed to mourn and share the memories of the dead. However, their goals and activities were not limited to private functions. The martyrs acted with a purpose, and the most proper way to honor their memory was to follow in their footsteps. To do so meant to "inherit the spirit of the martyr" (*yŏlsa chŏngsin kyesŭng*). Consequently, the commemoration societies served the broader movement by organizing various activities that bridged martyr commemoration with the goals of the movement. There were many ways to commemorate martyrs. But in the late 1980s into the early 1990s, martyr commemoration often meant directly confronting the political power that necessitated martyrdom. The commemoration society for Kim Sejin and Yi Chaeho offers an example.

> Let us hold high the torch that burns with the blood of martyrs and begin our long march for peace and reunification. At a time when the honorable will of the martyrs asks us to throw off our greed and complacency, let us unite in love of our nation and embark on a struggle to bring about a new chapter in our national history. . . . Having strong faith that the deplorable reality of our nation, where treachery punishes patriotism and dominance and oppression run rampant, will come to an end and that the new era of independence, democracy, and reunification will arrive, we declare the foundation of the Kim Sejin Yi Chaeho Commemoration Society with all compatriots who share the patriotism of the two martyrs.[55]

Kim Sejin and Yi Chaeho were Seoul National University students who self-immolated in protest of mandatory military training of male college students as well as the US influence they believed was behind the policy. While the self-immolation of the two students took place in April 1986, their com-

memoration society was founded on the day that marked the second anniversary of their self-immolation in 1988. The above excerpt from the founding statement of the Kim Sejin Yi Chaeho Commemoration Society shows little difference from an agitative political pamphlet. In fact, the founding ceremony itself was organized as part of a mass demonstration denouncing US influence in South Korea with thousands of students from ten universities in attendance.[56] The organization of the commemoration society also resembled a movement coalition. More than a dozen dissident leaders joined as steering committee members, with Reverend Mun Ikhwan serving as president.[57]

That there was little distinction between commemoration societies and movement organizations is no surprise, since the very activists who fought with the martyrs played a key role in founding these societies. The only added component was the family members, more specifically, the parents, whose lives had been transformed by the deaths of their beloved children. The parents, driven by their need to understand the motive of their child, were soon exposed to the dissident worldview that their child had subscribed to. Soon the parents came to see the injustices in society as the cause of their child's deadly protest. This transformative process was reinforced as the parents came into closer contact with the activist friends of their child for emotional support, and as they became subject to thorough and persistent surveillance of the police who saw the parents as dangerous instigators of protest. Consequently, the police set their task to insulate the parents from other movement organizations or public demonstrations.[58] The consciousness of the parents transformed; they slowly turned into "fighters" (*t'usa*).

The symbiotic relationship between the commemoration societies (embodied by the parents of the martyrs) and the minjung movement was based on shared interest. Following their parental instinct, the parents were following a mission to raise awareness of their children as well as why they had to die. Many movement organizations and the political events they organized provided fitting venues for their cause. From the movement's point of view, invoking martyrdom and sharing the raw emotions that only family members could provide offered a critical resource that enhanced the appeal of the movement in a society where family ties were deemed most precious. The mothers and fathers of martyrs were frequently invited as speakers at public demonstrations, and many of them became dignitaries within activist circles, including Yi Sosŏn, the mother of Chun Tae-il, Pak Chŏnggi, the father of Pak

Chongch'ŏl, Pae Ŭnsim, the mother of Yi Hanyŏl, and Kang Minjo, the father of Kang Kyŏngdae. Media attention on the parents increased, especially on anniversaries, of which there was no shortage. The stories of the martyrs told by their parents accentuated the human aspects of the martyrs as well as the injustices they dared to challenge, which in many cases became the backbone of the narratives honoring the martyrs.[59]

If participating in protest events and giving support to other families constituted the key activities of commemoration societies in the 1980s and early 1990s, their focus began to change in the 1990s reflecting the changes in the political environment. In December 1997, former dissident Kim Dae Jung (Kim Taejung, 1998–2003) won the presidential race and became the first opposition candidate to assume the presidential office in South Korean history, followed by the election of human rights lawyer Roh Moo-hyun (No Muhyŏn, 2003–8) as president in the 2002 elections. During this ten-year period of presidency by former dissidents, the commemoration societies made strenuous efforts to introduce commissions and legislation that would honor and bring justice to those who had suffered in the course of democratization. Their efforts bore fruit and, in May 2000, the Law on Honor Restoration and Compensation of Persons related to the Democratization Movement (Minjuhwa Undong Kwallyŏnja Myŏngye Hoebok mit Posang tŭng e Kwanhan Pŏmnyul) and the Special Law on the Truth Commission on Suspicious Deaths (Ŭimunsa Chinsang Kyumyŏng e Kwanhan T'ŭkpyŏlpŏp) were put into effect.[60] Finding favorable conditions under the new political climate, the commemoration societies began to expand their scope of activities.

Table 8.2 presents the eight areas of action by the CCNDM in 2016. While the CCNDM puts "inheriting the spirit of the martyr" at the center of all its goals and activities, we can see how the range of actions has broadened compared to the late 1980s. The eight areas of action can be further broken down into three strategic focuses. First, the conventional activities of publishing newsletters and hosting annual commemoration events continue to be an important part of the activities, which reflects the continuing need to sustain the support network and connect with other organizations within the activist community. Second, we see significant expansion in research, educational programs, and various PR efforts that target not only members of the activist community but also the broader public, including children. Lastly, we see the CCNDM placing a considerable amount of effort on the investigation of sus-

picious deaths, institutional reform to prevent similar cases, and restoring the honor of martyrs. These programs represent the legal strategies related to official recognition and compensation of martyrs that emerged with the changes in the political climate, most specifically, the new laws to honor past sacrifices and investigate unsolved incidents. While one of the main goals of

Table 8.2. Council for the Commemoration of National Democratic Martyrs (CCNDM) Activities to "Inherit Martyr Spirit"

Educational activities to "inherit the spirit of martyrs"	• Visit martyr burial sites • Teach modern history and movement history through the "Martyr Spirit Inheritance School" • Organize "History and Life Reading Contest" for teenagers
Truth investigation of suspicious deaths and action against oppressive state agents	• Seek truth of martyrs who died of torture and fabrication • Legislate autopsy procedures • Eliminate the statute of limitation for anti-human rights state criminal activities • Seek democratic transformation of the oppressive security apparatus
Restoration of honor of martyrs	• Provide historical, social, and institutional honor restoration and compensation (yeu)
Martyr research, publications, and public relations	• Publish martyr newsletter • Publish martyr sourcebook, *Kŭnnae sallira* • Provide information on individual martyrs • Publish martyr calendar
National commemoration event for martyrs and victims	• Facilitate annual event to commemorate 500 martyrs and victims
Reunification campaign	• Shine new light on martyrs/victims of division • Create and maintain exchange program with registered martyrs in North Korean factories and colleges
Bereaved families campaign	• Support loved ones who have lost a family member
Other commemoration activities	• Name streets after martyrs • Conduct miscellaneous activities to inherit martyr spirit

Note: This table is a representation based on the translation of the full list of the Council for the Commemoration of National Democratic Martyrs (CCNDM) activities (hanŭn il) in the introductory section (sogae) of the CCNDM homepage.

Source: Council for the Commemoration of National Democratic Martyrs (CCNDM), Accessed July 6, 2016. www.yolsa.org.

the activities was to reach out to the public and to policymakers to honor the martyrs, many of the programs, such as routine visits to martyr graves or campaigns to name streets after martyrs, suggest the extent to which martyrdom had already become a routine part of life to many in South Korea.

Individual commemoration societies varied in their capacities, but each of them ran a number of programs that helped establish martyrdom as an indispensable part of historical memory. Most commemoration societies maintained a homepage or a bulletin board where members could share information, published newsletters that were distributed among members and friends, hosted commemoration ceremonies every year, and joined hands with other groups and movement organizations in solidarity to promote the "spirit of the martyrs." With 146 commemoration societies affiliated with the CCNDM alone, this led to a significant number of days of commemoration that filled the activist calendar.[61] The number of commemoration events also proliferated, with each event serving as a chance to solidify the collective identity of the participants as well as providing the opportunity to expand the access points with the general public.

Among the many examples, the case of how Chun Tae-il's act of self-immolation has been remembered in the public shows how one man's self-immolation could acquire a social meaning that has come to define a generation. The construction of Chun Tae-il's martyrdom did not happen at once. Due to the overwhelming political control of the Yusin system, the narrative of Chun Tae-il's life and death was confined within a narrow activist community in the 1970s. It was the bloodshed in Kwangju in May 1980 and the subsequent spread of the minjung consciousness that generated a strong need, and opportunity, to rediscover Chun Tae-il as a powerful symbol of unrelenting activism. The publication in 1983 of Chun Tae-il's biography, *Ŏnŭ ch'ŏngnyŏn nodongja ŭi sam kwa chugŭm* (The life and death of a young worker), gave a big boost in this regard, as the book became one of the centerpieces in the activist curriculum of hundreds of study groups. In 1984, the Chun Tae-il Commemoration Society (Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏm Saŏphoe) was formed and was followed the next year by the Chun Tae-il Memorial Hall (Chŏn T'aeil Kinyŏmgwan), a modest office space in the Peace Market where Chun had worked and died.[62]

Like other martyrs, the narrative of Chun Tae-il's martyrdom found a greater audience as South Korea underwent the transition to democracy. The

Great Workers Struggle of the summer of 1987 established South Korean labor as a force to be reckoned with, and the martyrdom of Chun Tae-il once again gave the inspiration. In 1988, the new labor organizations held a historic rally at Yonsei University. The organizers purposely set the day of the event on November 13, the day when Chun Tae-il self-immolated eighteen years before. The event was named the National Workers' Rally to Commemorate Chun Tae-il's Spirit and Revise Unjust Labor Laws (Chŏn T'aeil chŏngsin kyesŭng mit nodong akpŏp kaejŏng chŏn'guk nodongja taehoe).[63] Thereafter, November 13 became one of the two most important days on the calendar of the labor movement alongside May Day. In 2009 and 2010, when the labor movement found itself under attack under the conservative Lee Myung Bak (Yi Myŏngbak, 2008–13) administration, Chun Tae-il was invoked once again as the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions named the annual workers' rally, the National Workers' Rally to Inherit the Spirit of Chun Tae-il (Chŏn T'aeil chŏngsin kyesŭng ŭl wihan chŏn'guk nodongja taehoe).

The symbolism of Chun Tae-il was not confined to the activist community. With continuing democratization, the narrative of Chun Tae-il's self-immolation became increasingly integrated into the mainstream culture. In 1995, his life was made into a commercial film, *Arŭmdaun ch'ŏngnyŏn Chŏn T'aeil* (A single spark). Financed through crowd-sourced contributions from 7,544 citizens with some of the main actors offering to be cast pro bono, the film opened to the public on November 13, 1995, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of Chun's self-immolation. Three hundred and fifty former movement leaders attended the screening on the opening night. Among them was Chang Kip'yo, who as a Seoul National University law school student, had rushed to the scene of Chun's fiery protest in 1970. Moved to tears he said, "The activists' Chun Tae-il now returned to us as everyone's Chun Tae-il."[64] The film was a commercial success and won critical acclaim in South Korea and abroad. The sale of Chun Tae-il's biography soared, too, following the success of the film.[65]

In the 2000s, the commemoration of his life and death reached a new stage as the Chun Tae-il Commemoration Society became fully institutionalized. After years of campaigning, Chun's life story entered school textbooks; new books were published that illustrated his life, including children's books; and, in addition to the Chun Tae-il Literary Award and Chun Tae-il Labor

Award that started in 1988, the Children's Literary Award was newly created in 2005. In the same year, a two-meter bronze statue of Chun Tae-il's upper body was erected on top of a bridge that connected the two sides of the Cheonggye Stream near the Peace Market where Chun Tae-il died. Marking the fortieth anniversary of Chun Tae-il's self-immolation in 2010, the city of Seoul decided to officially give the bridge on which the statue stood a new name, the Chun Tae-il Bridge, to be used in company with its original name of Pŏdŭltari.[66]

CONCLUSION

Despite Chun Tae-il's self-immolation in 1970 and its 1960s precedents, burning oneself in protest was a relatively alien form in South Korea. It remained so for quite a while until about 1986 when self-immolation entered the scene of the pro-democracy movement with a sudden burst. This was a time of a climactic surge in the pro-democracy movement. The frequent clashes with state power intensified the sense of political urgency, and the minjung ideology called on activists to fully dedicate themselves to their historical mission, providing a fertile ground for extreme acts to take place. The rise of self-immolation as a protest repertoire went hand in hand with the construction of martyrdom. In the narrative of martyrdom, the martyr was portrayed as a torchbearer whose ideas and actions needed to be carried on by the survivors. As more and more people became exposed to stories of martyrdom, a norm that prioritized utmost commitment took root within the activist community. More activists dedicated their lives to the collective cause through self-immolation, with each instance of martyrdom offering an additional moment of reflection among the survivors.

After hitting its peak in 1991, the number of self-immolations fell by the mid-1990s as a result of continuing democratization and the concomitant decline of the minjung paradigm. Nonetheless, the real puzzle lies in the fact that self-immolation continues to be used by activists across diverse categories and issue areas even to this day. Why would people still use self-immolation when the political and ideological conditions have markedly changed? Some might argue that this has much to do with the failure of democratic mechanisms and neoliberal reforms that trap certain social categories, such as irregular workers, into desperate realities.[67] This might be true to a certain

extent, but we should also note that workers in other countries—who are similarly forced into desperate life conditions—do not necessarily resort to self-immolation. If self-immolation continues to be used as a method of protest in South Korea, it is because it has become accepted as a cultural form. And the ubiquitous narrative of martyrdom that portrays self-sacrifice as an honorable act as well as the traces of martyrs found in popular culture and everyday life, in books, films, songs, statues, bridge names, etc., have continued to render a degree of familiarity, and availability, to potential users of this deadly weapon.

Herein lies a dilemma. It is only human to honor those who sacrificed their lives for a bigger cause, and it is only understandable that the martyr is invoked to win the hearts and minds of the people in the context of political struggles. Yet, the approval conferred to the meaning of this deadly act might be taken as an approval of the act itself by some, inadvertently contributing to the continuation of self-immolation.

NOTES

1. Hagen Koo, "The State, Minjung, and the Working Class in South Korea," 139; and Paul Y. Chang, *Protest Dialectics*, 56.

2. Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 220.

3. Hŏ Chaehyŏn, "Chŏn T'aeil tongsaeng 'Pak Kŭnhye, Ssangyong punhyangso nŭn an kamyŏnsŏ'" [Chun Tae-il's sister: "Park Geun-hye didn't even visit the incense altar of [dead] Ssangyong worker].

4. Many studies have identified Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation to have triggered the spread of self-immolation as a means of protest to other countries in the contemporary context. See Kevin Crosby, Joong-Oh Rhee, and Jimmie Holland, "Suicide by Fire," 60–69; Michael Biggs, "Dying Without Killing," 173–208; and James Verini, "A Terrible Act of Reason."

5. Loren Coleman, *The Copycat Effect*, 51–52.

6. Ibid., chapter 6.

7. Minjok Minju Yŏlsa Hŭisaengja Ch'umo (Kinyŏm) Tanch'e Yŏndae Hoeŭi [Council for the Commemoration of National Democratic Martyrs].

8. Mark Williams, *Cry of Pain*, 114.

9. "Changch'ungdan kongwŏn sŏ punsin chasal: Yebiyŏk taeryŏng Pak Ŭijang e t'anwŏnsŏ" [Retired colonel self-immolates in Changch'ungdan Park: Leaves a petition letter to Chairman Park].

10. "Korean is Suicide Near Park's Home."

11. "Chŏngŭi wihae chugnŭnda oech'imyŏ punsin: Ch'ŏngnyŏn namja hwibaryu ro punsin" [Middle-age man kills self with gasoline fire shouting: "I die for justice!"], 4. Two months later, on June 3, 1964 the Park Chung Hee government declared martial law to quell the simmering opposition against the normalization policy by military force.

12. "Ch'up'unghoe kanbu ka punsin" [Ch'up'unghoe officer self-immolates: Attempts suicide in front of National Assembly].

13. "Ponji e sŏhan chŏnsong" [Letter sent to our newspaper].

14. "Funeral Procession Brings Seoul Clash," 3.

15. Ibid.

16. Hyojoung Kim, "Micromobilization and Suicide Protest in South Korea, 1970–2004," 549.

17. Here, I am drawing on the concept of "cognitive liberation," which sheds light on the ideational process in which previously acquiescent political challengers enter a new state of awakening where they are able to "collectively define their situations as unjust and subject to change through group action." Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1979*, 51. Doug McAdam saw cognitive liberation as a necessary condition for successful mobilization in addition to favorable political opportunities and effective organizations. In a similar vein, Charles Kurzman distinguished "structural opportunity" from "perceived opportunity," arguing that any changes in the political environment favorable to collective action needs to be perceived as such in order for mobilization to be successful. Charles Kurzman, "Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social Movement Theory."

18. Hagen Koo, "The State, Minjung, and the Working Class in South Korea"; Namhun Lee, *The Making of Minjung*; and Kenneth M. Wells, ed., *South Korea's Minjung Movement*.

19. Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 12.

20. Byeong-chul Park, "Political Suicide among Korean Youth," 66–81.

21. Namhee Lee, "From Minjung to Simin," 41–57; and Dong-Choon Kim, "Growth and Crisis of the Korean Citizens' Movement."

22. Kim Hyŏnt'ae, "'Kaamnyu ro saenghwalgo . . . haegoja pokchik haeya yusŏ: Tusanjung nodongja punsin chasal" ["Hardship due to provisional seizure . . . reinstate laid-off workers": Tusan Heavy Industry worker self-immolates], 15.

23. Pak Yŏngnyul,"Nodongja ŏlmana chugŏya chŏngch'aek pakkwimnikka: Punsin Sewŏn T'ek'ŭ nojo wiwŏnjang taet'ongnyŏng e kŭl namgyŏ [How many workers have to die to change the policy: Self-immolated Sewŏn Tech Union head leaves a note for the president]; and Chŏng Taeha, "Nodongja taehoe pijŏnggyujik punsin" [Irregular worker self-immolates during workers' rally], 15.

24. Hwang Yerang, "Pijŏnggyujik Chŏng Haejin ssi kŏnsŏl nojo 131-iltchae p'aŏp chiphoejung punsin samang" [Irregular worker Chŏng Hae-jin self-immolates and dies

during rally on the 131th day of strike], 12; and Hwang Yerang and Hwang Poyŏn, "Tto punsin . . . pijŏnggyujik 'pyŏrangkkŭt' oech'im'" [Self-immolation again . . . irregular worker's scream "from the edge"], 6.

25. Pak Yŏngnyul, "Nongmin punsin chungt'ae: Yi Kyŏnghae ch'umo chiphoe tojung 'Yŏlsa ttŭt itcha' kido" [Farmer in critical condition after self-immolation shouts: "Let's inherit martyrs' spirit!" during Yi Kyŏnghae commemoration event], 15.

26. Pak Yŏnghyŏn and Yu Sŏnhŭi, "Ssal pijunan Minno-Minju panbal sok kukhoe t'onggwa" [Rice ratification bill passes amidst opposition from Democratic Labor Party and Democratic Party], 1.

27. Yi T'aegyu, "Nojŏmsang punsin chungt'ae: Tansok hangŭi mom e hwibaryu ppuryŏ" [Street vendor in critical condition after self-immolation: Poured gasoline over body to protest crackdown], 25; Hwang Chunbŏm, "Nojŏmsang tansok hangŭi punsin" [Street vendor self-immolates protesting crackdown], 15.

28. Yi Chunho, "Il Tokto mangŏn hangŭi punsin kido" [Self-immolation attempt in protest of Japan's Tokto remark], 23; and Nam Chongyŏng, "Sasip-tae 'Tokto nŭn uri ttang' oech'imyŏ punsin" [Man in forties self-immolates shouting "Tokto is our land!"], 8.

29. This seems to have been more frequent in the wake of the 1997–98 financial crisis, as many South Koreans found themselves under enormous financial duress. Kim Hongsŏng and Kim Hant'ae, "Chŏngni haego: Pusŏ idong e 40-tae ŭi sŭlp'ŭn chugŭm" [Layoffs and demotions: The sad deaths of men in their forties], 19; Chŏn Chŏngyun, "Pittokch'ok pigwan 30-tae punsin" [Pressed for debt payment man in thirties self-immolates], 14; and Yi Wan, "Taehyŏng mat'ŭ napp'um silp'ae robuto: Chungso ŏpch'e sajang punsin" [Small business owner self-immolates as business goes bankrupt due to supply contract failure], 12.

30. Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action," 273–86.

31. Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 151.

32. Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834*.

33. Mark Traugott, "Barricades as Repertoire," 142–73.

34. Michael Biggs, "How Repertoires Evolve," 407–28.

35. Alex Zielinski, "Veteran Dies After Setting Himself on Fire Outside VA Health Clinic."

36. Rich Schapiro and Corky Siemaszko, "Neighbor Says Man Who Set Himself on Fire at National Mall Had Railed Against America."

37. The VA crisis forced the VA secretary, Eric Shinseki, to resign in March 2014. Michael D. Shear and Robert A. Oppel Jr., "V.A. Chief Resigns in the Face of Furor on Delayed Care."

38. For example, see the coverage of the 2013 self-immolation case in front of the National Mall by the *Washington Post* or National Public Radio (NPR) and compare them

to the *New York Daily News* coverage. Bill Chappell, "Family of Man Who Set Himself on Fire Says Act Wasn't Political"; Martin Well, "New Jersey Man Identified as Mall Fire Victim"; and Rich Schapiro and Corky Siemaszko, "Neighbor Says Man Who Set Self on Fire at National Mall Had Railed Against America." On the self-immolation in front of the New Jersey VA health clinic in March 2016, see Benjamin Krause, "Veteran Died Who Lit Self on Fire."

39. Hernando de Soto, "The Real Mohamed Bouazizi."

40. Thessa Lageman, "Mohamed Bouazizi: Was the Arab Spring Worth Dying For?"

41. Nada Bakri, "Self-Immolation Is on the Rise in the Arab World."

42. Francesca Polletta, *It Was Like a Fever*.

43. David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization," 197–217; and Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements," 611–39.

44. Neil Whitehead and Nasser Abufarha, "Suicide, Violence, and Cultural Conceptions of Martyrdom in Palestine," 395; Farhana Ali and Jerrold Post, "The History and Evolution of Martyrdom in the Service of Defensive Jihad," 615–54; and Anna L. Peterson and Brandt Peterson, "Martyrdom, Sacrifice, and Political Memory in El Salvadore," 511–42.

45. Yi's funeral was observed as a national people's funeral (*minju kungminjang*) that lasted the entire day. It began at 7 a.m. at Yonsei University with commemoration events held at Sinch'on Rotary and the City Hall Plaza before the procession reached the Mangwŏl-tong Cemetery in Kwangju later that night. "Tosim meun aedo haengnyŏl" [Mourning crowd fills city center]," 11.

46. Mun Ikhwan was one of the 2,335 political dissidents, including Kim Dae Jung, who received amnesty on June 8, 1987. "Kim Taejung-ssi tŭng 2,335-myŏng samyŏn pokkwŏn" [Two thousand three hundred and thirty-five, including Kim Dae Jung, receive amnesty], 1.

47. "Yi Hanyŏl yŏlsa yŏnggyŏlsik chung Mun Ikhwan moksa ŭi yŏnggyŏlsa 'yŏlsa yŏ'" ["Dear Martyr," Reverend Mun Ikhwan's eulogy in Martyr Yi Hanyŏl's funeral].

48. The common estimate of the deaths in Kwangju throughout the 1980s and much of the 1990s, used to be 2,000 before the official government investigation was made. This estimate originates from the Citizens' Army headquarters' report in the wake of the military massacres that put the dead at 2,000, alongside 1,000 injured and 2,000 missing persons. See Henry Scott-Stokes and Jai Eui Lee, *The Kwangju Uprising*, 209. The number shrank considerably with the investigation. Based on the compensation records, the May 18 Memorial Foundation estimates the numbers at 154 dead, seventy missing, and 7,628 wounded. 5.18 Kinyŏm Chaedan [The May 18 Memorial Foundation], accessed February 14, 2018, www.518.org/sub.php?PID=010104. However, other Kwangju Uprising-related organizations put the estimate at 606 deaths. Kim

Yŏngt'ae, "5.18 samangja 606-myŏng . . . T'onggye charyo palp'yo" [606 dead on 5.18 . . . statistics revealed], 3. As Bruce Cumings notes, the exact number of people who died during the Kwangju Uprising would probably never be known. Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 378.

49. This includes those who died while fighting against Japan for independence before and during the Colonial Period (1910–45), the more than 180 who died in the course of the 1960 April Revolution that toppled Syngman Rhee's (Yi Sŭngman) autocratic rule, and the self-immolators who protested the normalization treaty with Japan in 1964 and 1965. Han Chongsu, "Kodŭng haksaengdŭl 4.19 hyŏngmyŏng ŭi ach'im ŭl yŏlda" [High school students open up the dawn of the 4.19 revolution]. The need to construct a narrative distinct from the official narrative of the government could have been a reason. In spite of multiple revisions, the preambles of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea had already appropriated the anti-Japanese independence struggle and the April Revolution as the key source of legitimacy since the Third Republic's constitution in 1963, with the exception of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic (1980), which took out the reference to the April Revolution. The current constitution, revised in 1988, finds its source of legitimacy in "the cause (*pŏpt'ong*) of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea established through the March First Movement [of 1919] and the democratic ideals of the April 19 Revolution [of 1960] that repelled injustice." The current constitution of the Republic of Korea is available on the English version of the Republic of Korea Ministry of Government Reliable Ministry of Government Legislation, Nation Law Information Center website http://law.go.kr. Past constitutions can also be viewed on this site.

50. Jose Aleman, "Protest and Democratic Consolidation," 71–90; Taehyun Nam, "The Broken Promises of Democracy," 427–42; and Sun-Chul Kim, *Social Movements and Democratization in South Korea*.

51. Byeong-chul Park viewed Pak Hyejŏng's death as an attempt to resolve her inner contradictions between value and action. Byeong-chul Park, "Political Suicide among Korean Youth," 73–74. For a brief biography of Pak Hyejŏng, including excerpts from her suicide note, see Kim Myŏngu, "Hollo sidae rŭl komin haettŏn Pak Hyejŏng yŏlsa rŭl kiŏk hada" [Remembering martyr Pak Hyejŏng who sought to understand the meaning of her time].

52. Interestingly, Pak Yŏngdu was the only case among the four whose death was officially recognized by the Presidential Truth Commission on Suspicious Deaths (Ŭimunsa Chinsang Kyumyŏng Wiwŏnhoe) as a state killing. Chŏng Hyŏkchun, "Kyodoso ŭimunsa Pak Yŏngdu ssi minjuhwa kwallyŏn 't'asal' kyŏllon" [Suspicious death of prison inmate Pak Yŏngdu concluded murder related to democratization]. The "suspicious deaths" of Chang Chunha, U Chongwŏn, and Kim Yonggwŏn are still contested today.

53. Mark Williams, *Cry of Pain*, 114–15; and Lacey B. Smith, "Can Martyrdom Survive Secularization?" 435–60.

54. Farhana Ali and Jerrold Post, "History and Evolution of Martyrdom," 631.

55. Kim Sejin Yi Chaeho Ch'umo Saŏphoe [Kim Sejin Yi Chaeho Commemoration Society], "Ch'angnip sŏnŏnmun" [Founding statement].

56. "Punsin tu taehaksaeng ch'umohoe palchoksik" [Founding ceremony of two self-immolated students], 11.

57. Kil Yunhil Yunhyŏng, "Musŏwŏssŏyo, mianhaessŏyo" [I was afraid, I was sorry].

58. This account is based on an interview article with Kim Jaehun, the father of Kim Sejin, who was a plant manager at public firm before he became a full-time activist. The interview was part of a *Han'gyŏre sinmun* 21, a special issue marking the twentieth anniversary of Kim Sejin's and Yi Chaeho's self-immolations. Kil Yunhyŏng, "Musŏwŏssŏyo, mianhaessŏyo."

59. For example, see how "the needle-hole story" told by Chun Tae-il's mother, Yi Sosŏn, became a recurring theme in the narrative of Chun Tae-il's martyrdom as well as a moral message to the survivors in Hwasook B. Nam's chapter in this volume. Hwasook Nam, "Reading Chun Tae-il."

60. Pak Chongch'ŏl and Yi Hanyŏl were the first to be recognized as persons of national merit in accordance to the Law on Honor Restoration and Compensation of Persons related to the Democratization Movement. Kim Taeho, "Pak Chongch'ŏl Yi Hanyŏl ssi 14-yŏn mane kongsik myŏngye hoebok" [Pak Chongch'ŏl and Yi Hanyŏl see honor restored in fourteen years].

61. Nancy Abelmann talks about the activist calendar as "a symbolically loaded roulette wheel" that consists of "numerical codes," such as 3–1, 4–19, 5–18, which refers to days of historical events considered important in the writing of minjung history. She recalls an anecdote about a conversation with a friend aboard a bus in June 1987 when "several people joined in the recitation to add dates they felt should be included." Her account offers an unusual insight into how central, and popular, the activist calendar was in the construction of a popular narrative among South Koreans during the tumultuous time. Nancy Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent*, 14.

62. Chŏn T'aeil Chaedan [Chun Tae-il Foundation], *Yŏnhyŏk* [Timeline].

63. Chŏnnohyŏp, *Chŏnnohyŏp paeksŏ* [Chŏnnohyŏp white book].

64. Han Sŏkchin, "Uri ŭi 'arŭmdaun ch'ŏngnyŏn': Chŏn T'aeil" [Our "beautiful youth": Chun Tae-il].

65. Chŏng Chaesuk, "*Chŏn T'aeil p'yŏngjŏn* yŏnghwa param t'ago pult'i'" [Riding on the success of film, sales of *The Biography of Chun Tae-il* is up]."

66. This was the first time a bridge was named after a historic figure in the history of Seoul. Hŏ Hwanju, "P'yŏnghwa sijang Chŏnggyech'ŏn 6-k ae 'Chŏn T'aeil tari' saengginda [Chun Tae-il bridge to appear on Cheonggye 6-ga near Peace Market].

67. Jamie Doucette, “Minjung Tactics in a Post-Minjung Era?”

9

Untimely Death and Martyrdom after May 1980: Suicide in the South Korean Democracy Movement Seen through the Case of Pak Sŭnghŭi

JUNG-HWAN CHEON

Death is absolutely overwhelming, incomparable, the one and only, the most crucial event in our life. As Heidegger said, we cannot experience but rather infer our death from the death of others.[1] We cannot easily evaluate another's life, which has ultimately concluded in death and therefore at once both life and death. I thus harbor doubts about whether there can be a language or a theory that allows proper explanation or interpretation of death or a suicide. It might be because I am rooted in the discipline of literature. I pay attention to social scientists' explanations on suicide but have never felt satisfied by them.

Another fact that troubles me is the horrible prevalence of suicide in contemporary South Korean society. The elderly, workers, and young people are killing themselves because of the burdens put upon them, which are specific to their generations and social classes. Among various factors are capitalist competition and socio-economic polarization, which have generated a sense of alienation and stress and continue to loom large in the background. Since 2009 more than ten laid-off workers of SsangYong Motors have committed suicide.[2] In the city of Daegu (Taegu), over a span of several months in 2012, ten teenagers threw themselves from buildings to commit suicide, and eight of them died.[3] As is well known, each year since the 2000s South Korea has ranked first or second in the world in terms of suicide rates.[4] Moreover, with the 2009 suicide of a former president and a string of suicides by celebrities, the entire nation has in a way become a pseudo-bereaved family (or survivor). Here I refer to the suicides of former president Roh Moo-hyun (No Muhyŏn, 2003–2008) on May 23, 2009 and of highly popular female actor Choi Jin-sil (Ch'oe Chinsil) on October 2, 2008. Thus, I often go through moments of

doubt about my capacity to tackle, by means of "distancing myself as a researcher" and merely writing about, the "weight of the world" that is immediately within the boundary of my own experience.[5]

I similarly feel an uneasiness toward the topic of this chapter, the events of May 1991. I am part of the so-called 386 generation, a term referring to South Koreans who, when the term was coined in the mid-1990s, were in their thirties, experienced college life during the 1980s, and were born in the 1960s. The word took shape when members of the generation, which led the student movement and the struggle for democracy, began to emerge in the mainstream of politics and society in the 1990s.[6] In my late teens and twenties, I lived through the era in which *death was pervasive*. When the incidents of May 1991 occurred, I was one of the university students demonstrating in the streets. I witnessed students my age discarding their lives for a cause. To many people, May of that year became a sort of brand that seared deeply into the soul. It is difficult to objectify these experiences.

Of course, we can treat certain types of death as a matter of history. For instance, we can talk about the changes in suicide rates, analyze the shifting perspectives on certain types of death, or trace changes in the society's reaction to suicide events. From a historical perspective, we can approach instances of death as signs of objective social changes and dynamics, independently from the subjectivity of the people who chose to die. We can expand from there and discuss issues of ethics, gender, and other socio-cultural topics.[7]

But I feel uncomfortable approaching the topic of May 1991 that way. The South Korean university scene has changed dramatically since the mid-1990s, and today's university students are coping with different kinds of oppression and indignation. The student movement has collapsed, and students do not set themselves on fire anymore, while workers continue to resort to self-immolation (*punsin*; literally, burning one's own body), as a means of protest. Thus, self-immolation in Korea has become a history (the past), even though, simultaneously, it clearly remains a present affair. I will apply historical interpretation to this past-yet-present topic but will also try not to be bound by the frame of logical analysis.

My uneasiness has much to do with the nature of the topic: self-immolation. The emotions that lead to self-immolation, including anger, grief, and guilt, are at the same time collective and personal in nature. Suicide is also, in all respects, an action of the singular being, acting in the first person. The

individual chooses suicide in the disjuncture between individual and collective subjectivity and in the fissure between private and public life. I would like to emphasize that we should preserve this disjuncture between the individual and collective nature of death and talk about it. I would like to avoid extracting categorical features from suicide cases. It is not my wish to talk about their deaths by making a coffin in which to lay them all together.[8]

In the following sections, I will briefly discuss South Korean cases of self-immolation since the 1980s and examine the circumstances and the context surrounding the death of Pak Sŭnghŭi in May 1991. By doing so I would like to explore the moral and ethical mentality of the period and how it changed, as well as raise questions about how best we might approach the disjuncture between the individual and the collectivity in the deaths under discussion.

YŎLSA NAMING AND ITS POLITICAL EFFECT

The title of yŏlsa, martyr-victim, is given to those who killed themselves or were killed in the process of the democracy movement.[9] Yŏlsa is an official term used by the Minjok Minju Yŏlsa Hŭisaengja Ch'umo/Kinyŏm Tanch'e Yŏndae Hoeŭi (Solidarity Council of Organizations in Commemoration of Martyrs/Victims for the Nation and Democracy) and by the Korea Democracy Foundation. It is originally a Chinese word with a long history, which can be traced back to the biographies (Ch. *liezhuan*, K. *yŏlchŏn*) of Sima Qian's *Shiji* (The records of the grand historian) and has been embedded with new meanings in South Korea since the 1980s.

Beginning in the 1980s and moving into the 1990s, "yŏlsa" became a word that South Koreans had to face every day but could never get used to, no matter how much they were exposed to it. In the beginning, as is well known, stood Chun Tae-il (Chŏn T'aeil), who set himself on fire in 1970. His image became the symbol for the whole range of South Korean social movements in subsequent decades. Then, after a Kyŏngwŏn University student, Song Kwangyŏng, self-immolated on September 17, 1985, other university students also began setting fire to themselves. According to one study, nine students chose suicide as a means of resistance against the Chun Doo-hwan (Chŏn Tuhwan) administration from 1980 until the June 1987 protest, and among them four died by self-immolation.[10]

Workers began to take up self-immolation during the 1980s as well. In particular, after a series of worker deaths by self-immolation in 1986, including Pak Chongman (Min'gyŏng Transportation Co.), Kim T'aeung (Taehwa Transportation Co.), Pyŏn Hyŏngjin (Samhwan Taxi), and Pak Yŏngjin (Sinhŭng Precision Co.), self-immolation took on a new meaning in the labor movement. The term "yŏlsa" also obtained new political meanings, and its use spread.[11] During the 1980s and 1990s, many workers gave up their lives in protest by dousing their bodies with paint thinner and setting themselves on fire.[12] In the spring of 1991, thirteen young people died in protest, eight by self-immolation. From the Roh Tae-woo (No T'aeu, 1988–93) administration to 2005, twenty-one university students and over twice as many workers (forty-five people) chose to express themselves and make an appeal to society through self-immolation.[13]

Self-immolation has been chosen as a weapon in order to exert maximum ethical power when the ruling power wields absolute violence to muzzle people's voices and isolate the less powerful. Thus, this "choice" is more like something "forced upon" the dissidents. Political scientist Cho Hyŏnyŏn categorizes worker self-immolation into two types: (1) a "condensed explosion or outburst of accumulated anger" and (2) a "premeditated political suicide." He argues that we need to differentiate between the two.[14] It is plausible, however, that premeditated political suicides were rare among workers, as few of them linked their sacrifice to the cause of the larger movement unlike university students. It seems that a large number of labor yŏlsa killed themselves because they were not able to contain their anger, or because they lacked other means, such as the law, with which to stand up against the violent repression. Sometimes self-immolation happened in an accidental manner, and most of the occurrences can be interpreted as an act of desperation, an act done to bring attention to an ignored truth. In this sense, *yŏlsa* (martyr) and *hŭisaengja* (victim) can be seen as overlapping categories.

Even in the period after the June 1987 struggle for democracy, which began a process of democratization in South Korea, it is hard to draw a line between yŏlsa and victims among the workers who committed suicide, as worker self-immolation often happens without a plan or intention to contribute to a certain cause. South Korean workers are still driven to desperation, and this shows the limitations of democracy the country has achieved during the post-1987 decades. Among the labor activists who committed suicide during the

Park Geun-hye (Pak Kŭnhye, 2013–17) administration were Ha Kwangho, Pae Chaehyŏng, and Yang Ugwŏn.

The pervasiveness of the title yŏlsa and its variations since the mid-1980s—national democratic yŏlsa, labor liberation yŏlsa, unification yŏlsa, yŏlsa for the emancipation of the poor—shows that something similar to the "politics" of yŏlsa became possible from that time on.[15] The politics of yŏlsa revolves around mobilizing ethics against enemies: the military dictatorship, imperialism, and monopoly capital. In other words, the images of self-immolating yŏlsa became a medium that, by appealing to moral senses, connects an awakening about the miseries of the world with collective actions. And in the background of all this we sense a politicization of the thinking, or mentalité, behind life and death. The politicized mentalité cuts across particularity and universality. In other words, both universal human attitudes toward life and death and particular Korean sensibilities originating from modern historical experiences intervene in this politicized mentalité.

Among these interposed elements, noteworthy components are the perceptions about *yojŏl* (Ch. *yaozhe*) or untimely death. "Yojŏl" is a Chinese word that contains a meaning of "being snapped when it is youthful and in its prime." The word itself expresses feelings of mortification, pity, and bitter sorrow. As an unnatural death and as yojŏl, the deaths of yŏlsa and victims share common features. In other words, their deaths are not blessed deaths reached after slowly passing through the four phases of life (birth, aging, sickness, and death), but sudden deaths that involve force and violence. It is a youthful death.[16]

Such a death brings shock. Most yŏlsa died in their twenties. As sociologist Kim Hongjung points out, yojŏl generates a linkage to authenticity. Young deaths generated a myth that "they combusted their short lives perfectly with utmost passion and intensity," and "under the illuminating light that such a myth emanated, ordinary life and survival became something not quite authentic, but rather wasteful and shameful."[17] Yŏlsa deaths establish that "securing a symbolic life" through "death that brings immortality" is "more meaningful."[18] And, the awakening and shock that this authenticity brings became an important emotional building block of the Korean democratization movement.

I would like to connect this authenticity, which has a somewhat trans historical nuance, to the spirituality or transcendental ethics of the South Korean

minjungism (*minjungjuŭi*) of the 1970s and the 1980s. While the term "minjungism," which shares similarities with people-ism (*inminjuŭi*) and proletarianism (*nodongjajuŭi*), may be translated as populism, it should also be understood as a term that indicates the historically distinctive ethical value aspirations and ideology (*yullijŏk kach'i chihyang kwa ideollogi*) formed in the historical context of the Korean minjung movement of the 1960s–80s. In short, minjungism, as an ideology, signifies a movement that aimed to be for the subaltern masses (*kich'ŭng minjung*)—and that sought to place the subaltern masses at its center. At the same time, the term implies that the main agents of the movement sought to enact sensibilities and a culture based on dispositions associated with the common people, such as being simple (*sobak*) and thrifty (*kŏmso*), as well as on empathy and compassion for the poor.

Spirituality or transcendental ethics indicate an ethical attitude that culminates in a transcendental attitude toward life's cravings and a spirit of self-sacrifice. The social movement in South Korea was firmly based on minjungism, whether it was a movement for the right to livelihood of lower-class people or a movement infused with a socialist ideology.[19] Minjungism was a call for a religious or a transsecular (*ch'o sesokchŏk*) ethics. It resonates with love, mercy, and benevolence, and it is a principle of action that traverses the distance between oneself and the Other or Otherness (death). Since minjungism is transpersonal (*ch'o kaeinjŏk*) it can materialize into communitarianism or collectivism. Hwang Chiu wrote in a poem in 1987, "Hurray! I am you. Hurray, hurray you are me. We are of one body. The constellation made of matchsticks burnt all up."[20] The transcendent moment of "I become you" is surely the moment of the *undong* (activist movement). The movement starts from the witnessing of suffering. Emmanuel Levinas said every suffering is passive in terms of "being hurt."[21] Faced with a suffering that cannot be distanced no matter how much one tries, the subject is ruled by suffering the same way they are ruled by the Other. Sentiment (*kamsŏng*) becomes a locus where the subject and the Other encounter each other. At this time, ego changes and accomplishes an "escape from one's identity."[22]

Thus, minjungism as an ethic reveals itself and is constructed through the sentiment toward the Other (Otherness), which can be summarized as death and the misery of the world. The misery of the world consists of poverty itself and the violence and ethical difficulties that are caused by and are inextricably

intertwined with poverty. Violence and hardships are inevitably linked to the disadvantaged and the minjung. In short, minjungism as an ethic is related to a sentiment of sympathy (*yŏnmin ŭi kamgak*) toward others who are living or dying in the shared time-space. This sentiment had been present since the 1970s, but in the 1980s there was more at play in the sentiment toward life and death in the activist movement. These additional elements included the Kwangju Uprising, a more radical revolutionary ideology, stronger trans-individuality (*ch'o kaeinsŏng*), and an identification with death (a sense of guilt or Thanatos).

THE SOCIAL AND ETHICAL ORIGINS OF THE "1980S-TYPE DEATH"

May and Kwangju

Literature on the 1980s-type death—that is, youths committing self-immolation—is surprisingly abundant. In it there are some malicious writings that attack and try to diminish the meaning of such deaths.[23] But most are serious works by political scientists and sociologists that explore the "phenomenon" of self-immolation and youthful death. These scholarly discussions point out that the suicide of yŏlsa was not "a social pathology or a deviant behavior of an individual that is affected by some heroism or nihilistic mood," and that self-immolation is "a type of social formation process in which an individual converts a sense of collective responsibility, rooted in his or her existential needs, into a collective identity as historical agent." [24]

Also, scholars have examined the social and historical origins of 1980s-type death. In terms of emotiveness and ethics, Kwangju became ground zero for the South Korean activism of the 1980s. Political scientist Cho Hyŏnyŏn explains that "1980s student activists who experienced Kwangju exhibited in general a much stronger sensitivity toward sorrow and anger and a greater sense of crisis than people from any other generation or activist group." "As a result," he argues, "these students were, relatively speaking, more likely to choose self-immolation, a path of resistance that involved extreme self-sacrifice."[25] But I find this view only partially acceptable. It is an exaggeration to say that student activists in the 1980s harbored a deeper and stronger anger. And there seems to be something missing in the logical sequence of the above sentence: "As a result," these students "were more likely to choose self-

immolation." The expression "experiencing Kwangju" can be misleading too. The experience of Kwangju was, for most students (and workers and citizens), an indirect one.

But mentioning Kwangju itself is important and pertinent. The sacrifice and victimization present during the Kwangju Uprising certainly provided the fundamental ethical and emotional motivation for the 1980s social movements. Activists of the 1980s consciously and unconsciously identified themselves with workers, students, and citizens of Kwangju who shed blood and tended to feel a strong sense of guilt toward their sacrifices. How then, did an identification with the people of Kwangju lead to a sense of guilt and make the contagiousness of suicide possible? Kim Wŏn provides a plausible answer: "The self-immolation as resistance is a traumatic event, and the meaning of death that was suppressed and not fully mourned in the aftermath of the Kwangju Uprising came back to haunt the time and space of the 1980s."[26] This kind of interpretation contains a psychological diagnosis about the function of mourning—that is, problems arising in the process of mourning that were suppressed and delayed. A death not fully mourned can be embedded as a trauma. It becomes an oppressive force that crushes one's soul, and may arouse suicidal compulsions.[27]

The Kwangju Uprising of May 1980 was indeed a traumatic event for both the ruler and the ruled, and for a long period of time it suffered from denunciation and suppression. It was denounced as an incident provoked by commies (*ppalgaengi*) or one accidentally started by a mob of rioters; speaking openly about it was prohibited.

The military administration also added severe insult to the deaths of Kwangju. For example, the Mangwŏl-tong cemetery remained a shabby place on the outskirts of the city of Kwangju, the long narrow access road to which was left unpaved and muddy, with no streetlights. At one corner of that neglected cemetery rest the graves of the victims of May 1980. Those graves were more like piles of earth, not worthy of the term "burial mound." Like hastily dumped dead bodies, dug and buried in a rush, they stood low and shabby, hardly having any monumental items or gravestones.

These graves, the sight of which resonated with the images and the video clips of the Kwangju Uprising that were recorded by foreign media personnel and secretly circulated, became powerful imagery and aroused guilt consciousness and anger. A massacre committed in broad daylight in modern

times, the dead bodies dumped and abused, and the funeral rituals not properly conducted: together these injustices touched the critical point in the realm of ethics and thoughts about life and death. And the continued suppression and discrimination might have been enough to generate a desire for Thanatos, "a fear of and attraction to death." For instance, while working as a special correspondent in Japan, Jurgen Hinzpeter, a reporter for the German broadcast station ARD-NDR, endangered his life and went to Kwangju in May 1980, where he documented the disastrous events that were carried out by the Martial Law troops, as well as the protests of the citizens. He evaded the South Korean military authorities and snuck the footage he had shot in Kwangju to Japan, from where it was sent on to the Hamburg news center for broadcast. As the international media broadcast these images, the tragedy of Kwangju was made known to the world. In 2017, this true story was made into the film *T'aeksi unjŏnsa* (Taxi driver) and played widely in South Korea. Interestingly, before June 1987, most South Koreans were made aware of the truth behind Kwangju by viewing video footage that was brought back into South Korea.

Thus, it is possible to see the many struggles of the 1980s as rituals of condolence and vows of commitment toward Kwangju's Uprising and its spirit. (As explained below, this also applies to the struggles in Kwangju in May of 1991.) The fact that there was no suitable method of resisting the oppressive power, a power that even represses death and marks condolences as subversion, has a great deal to do with the deaths of the 1980s.

Because the Kwangju experiences and the deaths were repressed, throughout the 1980s university students and activists vicariously and more intensely tried to re-experience them through images and narratives. The deaths of Kwangju formed a certain ethical standard. Every year in May at university campuses across South Korea, students erected the "Wall of Kwangju." After the June 1987 Democracy Struggle, people organized themselves as "Kwangju pilgrims," identifying themselves with the revolutionary figures of the citizens' army, including Yun Sangwŏn, a student activist who fought to the end and died defending the South Chŏlla Provincial Government Office. These sentiments are well captured in a poem by Bertolt Brecht, titled "I, the Survivor," which was well-known amongst university students.

I know of course; it's simply luck
That I've survived so many friends. But last night in a dream
I heard those friends say of me: "Survival of the fittest"
And I hated myself.

—Bertolt Brecht, *I, The Survivor.* Translated by John Willett

Yi Ch'angsŏng, a photojournalist who had reported on the Kwangju in May 1980, published a photo collection of the Kwangju Uprising, titled *Isip p'ar-yŏn man ŭi yaksok* (A promise twenty-eight years ago), in 2008. He had been unable to release the photographs he took in Kwangju because of the censorship from the military administration. Suppression made him feel guilty for twenty-eight years. Yi Ch'angsŏng wrote the following in the Introduction.

Once again May came. Every May, I cannot forget the glaring eyes of the citizens' army soldiers whom I came across during the Kwangju Uprising. . . . Most of them died. I, the survivor, could not escape from the sense of responsibility and guilt toward them. . . . They offered their own lives, but I, at most, published some photos. I am filled with tearful regret and a sense of frustration. Finally, I release my photos to the world as a historical witness, as I had promised to the leaders of the citizens' army in the Kwangju Uprising.[28]

Pak Hyejŏng's Death and the Guilt Consciousness of May 1986

In relation to this recognition of guilt, I would like to introduce a particular suicide-death. Pak Hyejŏng, a twenty-three-year-old Seoul National University student, drowned herself in the Han River on May 21, 1986. Her death occurred right after two other student deaths: on April 28, Kim Sejin and Yi Chaeho, both from Seoul National University, shouted "Anti-Imperialism/Anti-America," set fire to themselves, and jumped off a building to their deaths. On May 20 another Seoul National University student, Yi Tongsu, threw himself from the student union building in plain view of many students.

Unlike others who committed suicide in 1986, Pak explained relatively clearly her reasoning for killing herself.

Why can't I die? Why don't I die? Why don't I kill myself?

Not being able to commit suicide, not committing suicide when there is a clear reason, is cowardly, but suicide is somehow shameless. After agonizing together, after suffering in despair together, bailing out alone. Escaping alone by suicide.

Life without self-reflection. Life fearful of reflection. Self-reflection is scary. Therefore brazen it out. A language that does not know shame. . . .

The one who does not have the courage to live and suffer should die in shame.

The one who is not confident to share the pain of living, not merely a shameful life but a sin.

Hopelessness and lethargy.

The people of this land who have nothing, the oppressed, looking on while others are

unjustly deprived, in addition the sin of joining in this deprivation.

I cannot handle the debt of guilt any more.

I feel ashamed to everyone who lives a beautiful life.

It is only paying off the debt of not being able to love.

As I am unable to love in the future also.

Curse. . . . my sin of abandoning all the relationships.

Please curse me, curse and forget. . . .

—May 20, 1986[29]

A sensitive university student, Pak Hyejŏng was able to express the situation in which "being alive" in front of so many sacrifices, such as those of Kwangju, meant "sin" to her. This reflects the ethical feeling of the 1980s, and it may have formed a part of the era's sentiments toward death.

Pak Hyejŏng's suicide note moves one step forward from the poem of Brecht. Pak talked about what is the ultimate ethical boundary of living beings (that is, a being who is destined to die eventually) and the boundary between life and death. The contradiction of oscillating between life and death is itself the secret of life, which every ethical human being should bear. "The one who does not have the courage to live and suffer should die in shame," Pak wrote. In other words, suicide is an "ethical behavior" because for "the one who is not confident to share the suffering of living," it is "not merely a shameful life but a sin." That is, life becomes a sinful behavior toward death. But choosing death becomes an added sin to life. How did she reach this deep level of insight? Why was she seized by such a strong sense of guilt? It must have happened when her idiosyncrasies encountered the collective sentiments of the time.

Because Pak, in her note, wrote about death using such clear words, to some people her death became an even more difficult puzzle to solve. To elaborate, she herself coped with her own untimely death with strong and clear language, but to others, who were unable to "forget" her death as she had wished, her death became a *hwadu*, a question that they carried for a lifetime. This is because we cannot experience the loneliness she must have dealt with before her final decision and her death and also because we cannot reach the high ethical ground she achieved through death. The death of Pak grew into a symbol of 1980s-type death, at another level compared to other yŏlsa deaths, and was turned into a literary motif.[30] An untimely death of a youth, as a mystery, scars the pure soul of the survivor.

PAK SŬNGHŬI'S DEATH: THAT WHICH EXISTS BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND LIFE

Interaction between Death and Affection

Pak Sŭnghŭi, a female sophomore at Chonnam University, poured paint thinner over her body and set herself on fire on campus on Monday April 29,

1991, three days after riot police killed Kang Kyŏngdae, a Myŏngji University student. She became a fireball and ran across a square where students were holding a rally, yelling "Twenty thousand fellow students, unify and fight! Oppose America! Overthrow the Roh Tae-woo government!" Students around her put out the fire, but she died twenty-one days later unable to recover from the burns that covered her body. Spring of 1991 in Kwangju was unusually hot because of the flames sparked by the young girl. In downtown Kwangju, where her funeral was held, more than one hundred thousand people gathered.[31]

Pak, born in April 1972, was still a girl; she had just celebrated her nineteenth birthday. Among the many martyrs who immolated themselves since Chun Tae-il, however, she seems to be the one who prepared her death in the most conscious and meticulous manner. She was crystal-clear in all respects, including consciousness, ideological language, and emotional register. She wrote three suicide notes, calmly said goodbye to her parents as if nothing was happening, and walked out to meet her death.[32]

The year 2011 was the twentieth anniversary of Pak Sŭnghŭi's death. She was commemorated more than any other person who perished in 1991. Civil society organizations in Kwangju and the Chonnam University alumni association jointly held a well-attended event in Pak's memory and printed publications, including a source book and a photography collection, through the Association for the Inheritance of the Spirit of Pak Sŭnghŭi, Our Nation's Daughter and the Flame of Autonomy. Her high school erected a statue. Her death and the way she has been commemorated offer meaningful topics for our discussion. In her three suicide notes she laid out words that embodied the logic of her activist cause, and they were as clear as her death itself. Her dense and intense words left a strong and long-lasting impact on many people. Expressions similar to the following lines deepened the impact of her voice.

> I am bravely leaving, hoping that my path implants anti-Americanism into every single one of my twenty thousand fellow students and [as a result they] strive together to overthrow the regime. Now, in the so-called era of insensitivity, I hope my twenty thousand fellow students, who grieved and sympathized with fellow students at Myŏngji University [who lost Kang Kyŏngdae], would not simply go back to their original place of comfort and drink coffee or cola.[33]

Pak clearly explains her reasoning for ending her own life in her sentences "I am bravely leaving, hoping . . . ," and "I hope . . . ." Furthermore, she clearly defines what her death should mean to survivors. Taking her death as a wake-up call, she demanded, "every single one" of her fellow students must rise up to embrace anti-Americanism, and, when the shock of her death dissipates, must not go back to the previous mode of life as ones who "drink coffee or cola." Instead, she asked them to get rid of "insensitivity" and to change their way of being.

Sincerely asking "you" to change through "my" death, and articulating that wish so clearly before killing herself, Pak's case represented an uncommon type of suicide-death.[34] Her request to fellow students was premised on the mutual belief that "you" and "me" belong to a community, and "you" who are reading "my" suicide note would genuinely grieve and understand my death. "You" are the "twenty thousand fellow students," to whom her note was written. "Twenty thousand fellow students" refers to the entire Chonnam University student body. "oo-man (ten thousand) fellow students" was a saying used by student activists in the 1980s. That is to say, the scope of her thinking was not limited to the Chonnam University alone, even though the university student population in South Korea or in the city of Kwangju were not directly mentioned in the note. "Twenty thousand fellow students" was the range of the audience she spoke to in her notes and the range of community where "I" can be "you" and "you" can be "me." The shape of this community can be seen in the May 1991 Kwangju Struggle after Pak's self-immolation and again during the twentieth-year commemoration events in 2011.

Pak Sŭnghŭi also left other texts where the receivers or readers are clearly defined. If the audience "you" of the passage above refers to general fellow students (i.e., twenty thousand fellow students), the audience in the following paragraph are activists who are Pak's comrades or friends. More specifically, they are colleagues in the editorial team of *Yongbong*, the school magazine at Chonnam University. In this letter, Pak imagined the moments after her death and asked the following, from the vantage point of looking down at the mourning survivors from above.

> Don't just weep in sorrow; that is not what you should do. *You should fight with fire in your heart. You should struggle on the front line bearing hatred and burning hostility against the enemies.* That fight should not be yours alone, but *must*

be a fight in which every single one of the twenty thousand fellow students stand hand in hand, and fight together. I will always be with you, so please forge on with spirit, thinking of me, even if it gets arduous and painful. *There are cosmos seeds in my drawer. Please plant them where the twenty thousand fellow students frequent. I'd like to always be with you.*[35]

Pak asks *you*, the reader of the passage above, using much stronger, more concrete, fiercer words. "Struggle on the front line bearing hatred and burning hostility against the enemies," and plant cosmos along the street in order not to forget "my" wishes. The word "together" is emphasized. The reason why she emphasized "together" might be because she was sensing, facing the event of death, an existential uniqueness or the individuality of death.

Maybe because she asked it so clearly, Pak's words were dwelt upon and repeated when people commemorated her death and made meanings out of it. They were also poeticized.

Pretty autumn flower, don't bloom in spring days
Twenty-year-old lovely petals you shouldn't bloom alone
Ahead of the season, your soul is burning, blazing
Put fire on the whole body and a new day dawns.
Following your will, becoming democracy's flame, flare up in fiery, fiery blaze.[36]

Following her wish to plant cosmos flower seeds in response to her death, Pak became the "cosmos" of Kwangju and Chonnam University. There are a number of poems and symbolic constructs that compare her to a flower or cosmos. This conventional symbolic chain, of course, was possible, it seems, because she was a nineteen-year-old young woman. The symbol of the Pak Sŭnghŭi flower connects with the image of purity, youth, and beauty and is juxtaposed with fire or flame. Self-immolating yŏlsa martyrs since Chun Tae-il have shared that symbol of fire and flame. For instance, the English title of the critical biography of Chun Tae-il is *A Single Spark*. And the subjects appearing in the poems that memorialize Pak and evoke the symbols associated with her are fighting subjects.

With a hot anger that burns up our body,
Stab a lightning bolt into the enemy's heart!

On the blood-stained streets of struggle
Our Unified Nation breathes and spurts
Where the comrade's footsteps stay, shall bloom a red cosmos flower.[37]

Sŭnghŭi, when the day comes, when the day
we offer the flower of victory to your grave comes,
A patch of cosmos whispering and blooming
In every corner of Korea
Shall be named Sŭnghŭi flower,
Sŭnghŭi flower.
For that day we today
go to the Provincial Government Office,
For that day we today
Fight to the death
Fight embracing fire in heart
You, in the truly free new land,
Bloom in every corner as tall Sŭnghŭi flowers,
And look down on
people who plow the land of emancipation.[38]

Her note is perfectly realized, at least in the poems written for her. Her words continue to exert influence beyond the year 1991, when university students were agitated with passion for revolution and liberation and even after twenty years had passed, in the year 2011, until today.

Sŭnghŭi,
the flame of Asia, flame of Seoul, flame of Kwangju
you are the flame of the divided country
Encountering your death, when not even a day passed
Drinking coffee drinking cola
Plunging into even deeper indifference
Your body that was left like a lump of charcoal
Your body, which didn't look like a body that breathes
Seeking the day of national autonomy and liberation
Flared up as the flame of saving the country
Your body that became charcoal

Please do not just grieve
Standing in the front line, be a participant in our struggle
Your words
calling for the day when we achieve liberation
calling us.[39]

The symbols associated with Pak Sŭnghŭi, created in 1991 at the time of her death, have been used and reproduced over time. In addition to the founding of the Association for the Inheritance of the Spirit of Pak Sŭnghŭi, Our Nation's Daughter and the Flame of Autonomy, a literary collection commemorating her, *Haebang ŭi k'osŭmosŭ* [The cosmos of liberation], was published in 2011 and a documentary about her, *Nae kasŭm sok ŭi k'osŭmosŭ* [The cosmos in my heart] was released in the same year.

Political Context of Pak's Ideology

How should we interpret Pak's note that says she is "bravely" leaving not only in order to overthrow the Roh Tae-woo government responsible for the killing of Kang Kyŏngdae, but also "to plant Anti-Americanism in every single fellow student"? How should we understand her wishes that fellow students not drink coffee or cola? It is possible to interpret this in activist terms? Sociologist Yi Ch'angŏn argues, "[f]or students who embraced the National Liberation (NL) ideology like Pak Sŭnghŭi, nationalism provided a worldview that was strong enough to make a demand of 'martyrdom' acceptable to followers in the name of 'sanctification' (*sŏnghwa*) as the 'secular paradise of a perfect nation.'"[40] According to Yi, this period witnessed larger numbers of "warriors" and "martyrs" for the nation than any other period in South Korean history, and the "image of a student activist willing to become a martyr for the minjung and to take risks for the nation helped spread a bond of sympathy for anti-imperialism and nationalism as well as increase the guilt consciousness of not doing enough for the cause."[41]

This explanation uses the codes of nationalism and martyrdom to understand the death of Pak Sŭnghŭi. Yi's argument is that the sanctified nationalism (or minjungism) allowed the students who immolated themselves in the 1980s to identify themselves as warriors or martyrs; the Pak Sŭnghŭi case can be considered as fitting this framework. At the same time, Yi perceives that beneath that nationalism, a particular faction's ideology of anti-imperialism/

national liberation was at work.[42] This anti-imperial nationalism of the NL faction had fundamentalist characteristics. The NL theory, similar to nationalism in general, was based on the ideas of a sacred people and of the nation's ordeal, but the intensity with which to pursue these ideas seems to have been far greater than what we find in other nationalisms.

Meanwhile, according to that interpretation, the reason why Pak Sŭnghŭi mentioned coffee or cola as symbols of imperialist domination was not only because of her individual fastidiousness but also because of the unique cultural nationalism present in NL ideology. Nationalism in general contains culturalist characteristics, but fundamentalist nationalism accords ethnic signs and symbolism to every single thing and image, not only to nature and patterns of human behavior but also to mass-produced goods. Thus coffee and cola were easily considered symbols of Yankee culture or imperialism by some student activists. Sometimes even blue jeans were regarded this way.

Interestingly, NL ideology believes that national culture or character is to be considered as something complete, and the cultural expression of that idea emerged as a theory on character (*p'umsŏngnon*). As we can see in the well-known pamphlet *Kangch'ŏl sŏsin* (Letters of Kangch'ŏl), which was highly influential among students with anti-imperialist nationalist inclinations beginning in the late 1980s, the NL's theory of character was unique. Rather than a socio-economic diagnosis of the South Korean revolution, a discussion of the subjective and objective conditions of Korea, or Karl Marx's historical materialism, the *Letters of Kangch'ŏl* begins with a theory on character. More than any other revolutionary "logic," the ethical attitude of student activists was strongly emphasized. This is important. The ideology of anti-American national liberation, which placed the theory on character in the first section of the first paragraph of its doctrine, required of its activists a limitless dedication and also ethical integrity. This theory formed part of a unique ethical milieu of the South Korean revolutionary movement and of its activist political culture.[43]

Of course, activists and organizations outside the NL also tried to learn and embody the ethics of minjungism and embody the spirit of utmost dedication. Every movement embeds the values of love and solidarity and sympathy and self-sacrifice and demands these values of its members. Having the correct *p'umsŏng* (character), however, means that the activist not only wages everlasting struggle against the power and the authority of the establishment

but also assumes a hostile attitude against those people, seen as enemies, who do not share the same beliefs. That is why the movement can become cruel. Such hostility comes out of the values such as love, solidarity, sympathy, and self-sacrifice but manifests itself in activist behavior in exactly the opposite manner of its origins. The culture of the movement also demands of its activists an unwavering faith in ideology. That faith, unlike a religious belief, supposedly comes from and is fostered by cool-headed scientism and intellectualism. The activists of the movement, therefore, are required to have a contradictory mind-nature (*simsŏng*) that combines spirituality and science. To activists, the disjunction between the two is never small, and it can cause a tremendous ethical dilemma and even disconnection from realities. The NL theory, which highlights their theory on character, shares these general features with the Korean activist political culture of the time, but its own distinctive characteristics are also conspicuous. NL activists, compared to those of other activist groups, generally deemphasized intellectualism and scientism and were required to embody much stronger ethics of self-sacrifice and modesty.[44]

In short, the self-immolation of Pak Sŭnghŭi might have been an action produced in the process of making the ideology of anti-American direct struggle an actualized reality (*silch'ŏnhwa/yukhwa*). We can see a similar process at work in the first verse of the following song, titled "Aeguk ŭi kil" (The patriotic way; lyrics and music by Yun Minsŏk). The song became wildly popular among student activists following its release at the end of the 1980s, and Pak is said to have liked the song. The lyrics coincide with the content of Pak's suicide notes in both sentiment and ideology.

> Being born in the bosom of the colonized motherland
> Even if living only one day stepping on this land
> If my life has some purpose for my nation
> that would be expelling the Yankees [*migungnom*]
> Ah, following the anonymous warrior who fell down on the road to great liberation
> I'll be the first one to rise up and fight. Hurray, anti-America national salvation struggle.[45]

The North Korean-esque lyrics are, however, rather abstract in expression, although firmly based on the notions of sacrifice and anti-American nationalism. The NL group did not go to the extent of forcing sacrifice and death on members against their will. Instead, the NL ideology emphasized patriotism and faith that flowed from one's heart. Thus it seems that no one demanded that Pak show such an extreme degree of devotion. Rather, Pak reached a conclusion that to defeat the absolute enemy (for instance, US imperialism) political martyrdom was necessary, and she planned and carried it out perfectly and resolutely. In other words, by overidentifying with the ideology and sentiments of the group, she in the end exceeded the expectations of the group.

Here I would like to revisit Pak's suicide notes. One of the notes was for her parents. Her words and attitude in that note are also consistent. She calls herself an "undutiful daughter," but asks her parents, with clear and resolute words, to convert their sorrow of losing a child into anger. In the closing part of the note, she emphasizes the cause of anti-America and national autonomy as follows:

> How can I pay my debt for leaving before you?
>
> But please do not just grieve over the path I am taking. Please transform your sorrow into anger and fight vigorously. . . . Mom, Dad, I couldn't obey your wishes not to participate in demonstrations, to study hard, and stay away from protests. . . .
>
> I can't just look on any longer. By burning my body, if the spark is planted in every corner of the southern part on this peninsula, I think that I would follow along this path with pride. . . .
>
> Please, please do your utmost so that in the hearts of one thousand people, ten thousand people, flames of autonomy, democracy, and unification light up, and together they will strive to expel the Yankees from this land and establish a democratic government.
>
> —Year 47 of the Advance for Unification, your undutiful daughter Sŭnghŭi[46]

In South Korea, parents and values like the struggle for anti-American national autonomy cannot co-exist easily. Usually parents, family members, and lovers are excluded from politics and from political value judgment. This is not simply because of the bourgeois principle of separating the private and the public. It seems that intimacy and experiences make it possible to differentiate between intimate relationships and public values.[47] But if such public values have absolute importance and are internalized in the subject, parents or personally related people can be integrated into the values. And, it is possible for parents, because they are parents, to learn to understand their children's politics and be initiated into the way of struggle. Many Korean parents such as the members of the Min'gahyŏp (The Democratization Family Association) and the Yugahyŏp (The National Democratic Bereaved Family Association) have followed their children's footsteps. Pak's parents also pledged to live for "national autonomy, democracy, unification, and the expulsion of imperialist America," as their daughter had asked of them.[48]

CONCLUSION DONE TWO WAYS

Death as an Individual

The discussion about politics and ideology beats around the bush of context but does not address fully the individuality of life/death. That is why we should go back to the issue of the individuality of death. The deaths of Chun Tae-il, Hŏ Seuk, Yi Hanyŏl, Kang Kyŏngdae, Pak Sŭnghŭi, and Pak Hyejŏng are all different. In fact, until they set fire to their bodies—or even after they immolated themselves—their bodies and lives had little in common. Can we imagine Pak Sŭnghŭi's life as something other than that of a warrior? For example, can we put her back into the existential position of a nineteen-year-old woman and imagine her life and ego? Doesn't the following description better reveal the dialectic of life and death?

> Sŭnghŭi, short haired, wearing glasses, singing "Tears of Mokpo" in a mellow voice, eyes calmly closed, she opens her lips and beats time with her fingers. A little patriot who made envelopes and stationery papers with colored traditional paper for friends, who told others to wash their hair with

> soap and rinse with two to three drops of vinegar because shampoo and hair conditioner contained water pollutants, and who did not touch Hait'ai [name of a detergent], P'ongp'ong [dish washing soap] or cola.
>
> An ordinary warm-hearted female university student who was more diligent in cleaning [the premises] than anybody else and was always considerate of her colleagues of the editorial team and her friends, what on earth had happened in this land before she bought paint thinner, wrote her will, and set fire to her body?[49]

The above writing by her friend puts an ordinary, warm-hearted university girl back into her universe, as an individual with her own experiences and personality, away from the image of plural anti-American warriors. And it asks an appropriate question: "what on earth had happened in this land before she set fire to her body?" But we need to make this question more specific. "What on earth had happened" did not just happen to "this land," but to a nineteen-year-old female student and to the relations and the land around her.

What gap or a medium existed between the warm-hearted delicate girl and the self-righteous warrior who bravely gave up her life, bent on planting the seeds of anti-Americanism in every single one of her twenty-thousand fellow students, a woman who even tried to block others' "freedom" of going back to their daily routine and enjoying a mundane life? Who is the owner of this voice that informally calls her friends and fellow students "you guys" (*nŏhŭi*), completely identifies herself with them, and ends her sentences with *-hari* (will) and *-hara* (shall)? What is this dark and potent power of collectivity and history that intervened in and filled her individuality? What kind of an abyss or a plateau is the "I" of a young woman who set fire to her own body?

Her parents and friends who recall the person called Pak Sŭnghŭi twenty years after her death attempt to grasp the reason by remembering her personality. Over the years they recovered several memories. Growing up, even though she was extremely good-hearted and loved by old folks, she was especially stubborn since she was little. Later in high school she received training in the movement as one of the first-generation students of the members of the National Teachers' Union (Chŏn'gyojo) and stood up as a lone voice against the firing of her teachers in 1989 as a high school senior. When her

high school alums heard the news of her self-immolation they agreed that Sŭnghŭi's action fit her character and that she was a "person of principles."[50]

Through this kind of remembrance, she becomes a more complete individual being, compared to the exaltations of her as the Flame of Liberation or the Cosmos of May. Yet, there is still something missing. That is because existence exceeds words and death lies beyond everything. Many people died during and after the Kwangju Uprising, yet many more are still alive, plowing through those deaths.

A Historical *Conclusion*

If we exclude the individual dimension, we can talk about the South Korean student activists' mentality in the 1980s and their views on life and death in lieu of a conclusion. Perhaps during that period, the we/they, twenty-something activists, might not have fully discussed or seriously reflected on the meaning of the frequent and continuous youthful deaths and the lives of the yŏlsa martyrs. Was it not the case that the we/they were actually insensitive to and ignorant about death?

There might have been many reasons for such a situation. Those young people probably never pondered the meaning of their life and death in the way elders who die a natural death do. That is to say, their zest for living (Eros) instantly transformed into a compulsion for death (Thanatos).[51] While minjungism and other diverse ideologies directly informed that transformation, the shocking experiences of numerous deaths since the 1980 Kwangju Uprising also played an important role in it. To put it differently, we can say that young activists of the era, because of the prevalence of death among their peers, might have already been reaching a stage where they were one with death, at least halfway.

> The dark age of death, my friend, shedding heavy tears and red blood
> History calls, a far and rough road ahead, disappears with the sound of drums
> Even if far away, even if gone, the eyes of my friend shine in the starlight.[52]

The deaths of May 1991 were thus connected to the deaths that happened since 1980, while simultaneously representing a new act in the same play. Even when we put aside the views of such people as Kim Chiha and Pak

Hong, it is clear that death dwelled at the emotional core of May 1991.[53] It was very difficult for the we/they, as well as Pak Sŭnghŭi, to face the burden, the events, and the flowers of death. They did not know how to think about and contemplate death.

Then it is worth asking again, how were the many political martyrs' and activists' enchantment with death possible in the secular society of 1990s South Korea? This is related to the structure of cultural politics in the larger South Korean society of the period and the status of the student movement within it. A majority of the students who took their own lives were sons and daughters of worldly middle-class households. In addition, this history of sacrifice among South Korean university students had a defined historical time, beginning in the mid-1970s (with the suicide of Kim Sangjin) and ending in the mid-1990s.

The spring of 1991, a year in which death was rampant, was also a crucial point of inflection in South Korean social movement history. After that spring, an idea that the politics of yŏlsa might provoke aversion or fear in the general public began to spread. There were a series of incidents, including a case of an activist accused (wrongfully) of writing the suicide note of another activist who killed himself, and a much-publicized scene of the student assault on Prime Minister Chŏng Wŏnsik.[54] But what is more important were the changes on a deeper level. That is, the death of a yŏlsa—instead of awakening the spirituality of the observer, who has witnessed the sacrifice of life for a greater cause—began to have the completely opposite effect of amplifying the idiosyncrasy of the Other. The shock of suicide engenders both transcendental ethical feelings and idiosyncrasy. The current state of affairs in South Korea is that the latter has overshadowed the former.

After the 1990s, with the end of the 1980s, the guilt consciousness of Pak Hyejŏng or the conviction of Pak Sŭnghŭi became almost impossible. The same is true for minjungism or transcendental ethics. Perhaps this is, as Peter Sloterdijk and Slavoj Žižek have stated, because we are living in an era governed by "cynical reason."[55] The gap between the larger society and university students, along with the political culture of the student movement, has been disappearing. At the same time, South Korean universities have stopped being a sacred place for youth or a space where imagination for liberation blooms. Instead they are becoming vulgar, transforming into something akin to branch offices of a corporation.

NOTES

1. Haidegŏ Marŭt'in [Heidegger, Martin], *Chonjae wa sigan* [Sein und Zeit], 133.

2. Hong Yongdŏk, "2000-il kan ŭi ssaum . . . . Ssangyongch'a haegoja pokchik hanŭn nal, olkkayo" [A two-thousand day struggle . . . . When will SsangYong Motors reinstate its dismissed workers?].

3. Ku Taesŏn and Yi Chŏngguk, "Taegu 10-tae ŭi pigŭk . . . pannyŏn sae 10-pŏntchae t'usin" [The tragedy of teenagers in Taegu . . . the tenth attempt at committing suicide by jumping].

4. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) health data, the average rate of death by suicide among OECD countries in 2013 was 12.0 per 100,000 people. The 2012 statistic for South Korea was 29.1, the highest among the OECD countries that year. South Korea's ranking in this category has been consistently high for many years. Kwŏn Yŏngch'ŏl, "Hanguk, OECD chasallyul 1-wi wae an ttŏrŏjina?" [Why hasn't South Korea's top-ranking suicide rate come down?].

5. The term "weight of the world" is from the title of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's book, *La Misère du monde* [Weight of the world].

6. As this generation has gradually progressed through their forties and into their fifties, the 386 generation has come to be known as the "486 generation" and, in the present decade, the "586 generation."

7. On modern history of suicide in Korea, see my seven serial articles in *Naeil ŭl yŏnŭn yŏksa*.

8. My view of the existing literature on self-immolation follows the same line. Most of the works engage the topic of self-immolation in a thoughtful manner, but some works, especially those using comparative sociological methods or quantitative measurements to the responses to deaths, I find problematic. Political suicides, especially by self-immolation, are not limited to South Korea. There have been numerous cases of self-immolation suicide-protest in the world, including in Vietnam and in Soviet-satellite countries in Eastern Europe during the 1960s and 1970s. Recently, over one hundred cases occurred in Tibet alone. Literature on self-immolation in Western sociology is extensive. One of the noteworthy works is Michael Biggs's, in which he compares five hundred cases of self-immolation from 1963 to 2002. He argues that self-immolation has the most powerful effect on sympathizers compared to other protest methods, and that the ultimate outcome of the act depends on the political context in which protesters and their opponents operate. Biggs sees self-immolation clearly as a political tool and analyzes the macro-level political effects and contexts. From this perspective, he compares various instances of self-immolation, including those of 1960s Vietnam, the Chinese Falun Gong, and suicide bombings by Arabs. Michael Biggs, "When Costs Are Beneficial." For an example of works that use quantitative methods see Hyojoung Kim, "Shame, Anger, and Love in Collective Action." Kim analyzes guestbook entries

from 1991 to 1996 at Pak Sŭnghŭi's grave site to measure people's reactions to self-immolation. These works tend to lack historical perspectives.

9. Some activists who were murdered in the course of violent repression or torture are also included.

10. Yi Ch'angŏn, "Punsin chasal ŭi kujo wa mek'ŏnijŭm yŏn'gu: Haksaeng undong ŭl chungsim ŭro" [A study of the structure and mechanism of self-immolation suicide: Focusing on the student movement], 161.

11. See for example Kim Wŏn, "Chŏn T'aeil punsin kwa nodong yŏlsa t'ansaeng ŭi chŏngch'i" [Chun Tae-il's self-immolation and the politics of the birth of labor martyrs].

12. Examples include Sŏng Wanhŭi of Kangwŏn coal mine (1988); Wŏn T'aejo and Pak Sŏngho of Kŭmgang Industry (1990); Ch'oe Sŏngmuk of Sungho Transportation Company (1994); Yang Pongsu of Hyundai Motors (1995); Pak Samhun of Daewoo Shipbuilding (1995); Sŏ Chŏn'gŭn of Korea Railroad Company (1995).

13. Yi Ch'angŏn, "Punsin chasal ŭi kujo wa mek'ŏnijŭm yŏn'gu," 165. Two of the people were in their thirties and not college students. The deaths in 1991 will be discussed later.

14. Cho Hyŏnyŏn, "Han'guk ŭi minjujuŭi t'ujaeng kwa yŏksajŏk hŭisaeng: Punsin t'ujaeng" [South Korea's struggle for democracy and historical sacrifice: Self-immolation as resistance], 250.

15. On the politics of yŏlsa, see Hwasook Nam's chapter "Reading Chun Tae-il: Making Sense of a Worker Self-Immolation in 1970s South Korea" in this volume; and Kim Wŏn, "Chŏn T'aeil punsin kwa nodong yŏlsa t'ansaeng ŭi chŏngch'i."

16. When a person dies a natural death after enjoying a long life and good fortune, it is called *hosang*. The word contains a paradoxical meaning that such a death, although a death, warrants a joyous celebration.

17. Kim Hongjung, *Maŭm ŭi sahoehak* [Sociology of the heart], 39.

18. Ibid.

19. On the development of minjungism and its political attitudes, see Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*; and Kim Wŏn, "Chŏn T'aeil punsin kwa nodong yŏlsa t'ansaeng ŭi chŏngch'i."

20. Hwang Chiu, *Na nŭn nŏ ta* [I am you.], 132. Reprinted with permission from Moonji Publishing Co., Ltd.

21. Lebinasŭ Emmanuel [Levinas Emmanuel], *Sigan kwa t'aja* [Time and the Other]; and Son Yugyŏng, *Kot'ong kwa tongjŏng* [Suffering and sympathy], 36

22. Pak Inch'ŏl, "Chayu ŭi hyŏnsanghakchŏk inyŏm: Arent'ŭ wa Lebinasŭ ŭi chayu kaenyŏm pigyo rŭl chungsim ŭro" [The phenomenological idea of freedom: Focusing on the comparison between the concepts of freedom of Arendt and Levinas], 219–43. Quoted in Son Yugyŏng, *Kot'ong kwa tongjŏng* [Suffering and sympathy], 36.

23. See Youngju Ryu's chapter, "From Martyrdom to Apostasy: Kim Chiha and the Politics of Death in South Korean Democratization" in this volume.

24. Yi Ch'angŏn, "Punsin chasal ŭi kujo wa mek'ŏnijŭm yŏn'gu," 14.

25. Cho Hyŏnyŏn, "Han'guk ŭi minjujuŭi t'ujaeng kwa yŏksajŏk hŭisaeng," 237. Han Honggu offers a similar discussion: "The deaths in Kwangju and the deaths occurred because of Kwangju were already residing next to us. They had already entered us." Han Honggu, "Kwangju minjung hangjaeng kwa chugŭm ŭi chagak" [The Kwangju people's uprising and the awareness of death], 405–7.

26. Kim Wŏn, *Ich'yŏjin kŏttŭl e taehan kiŏk: 1980-yŏndae Han'guk taehaksaeng ŭi hawi munhwa wa taejung chŏngch'i* [Memories of what has been forgotten: The subculture of the South Korean university students in the 1980s and the mass politics].

27. Pŏt'ŭllŏ Chudisŭ [Butler, Judith]. *Purhwaksirhan sam: Aedo wa p'ongyŏk ŭi kwŏllyŏktŭl* [*Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*]. Kim Hyŏnggyŏng's *Choŭn ibyŏl* [Good farewell] contains a succinct and easily accessible discussion on the topic.

28. Yi Ch'angsŏng, *Isip p'al-yŏn man ŭi yaksok* [A promise twenty-eight years ago], 6.

29. Pak Hyejŏng, "Yusŏ" [Suicide note].

30. Survivors are in pursuit of something because of the wounds these deaths leave in their wake. In particular, the mystery of suicide prompts people to produce written works. Two among Pak Hyejŏng's university friends later became novelists. Novelist Kim Yŏnsu's "Tasi han tal ŭl kasŏ sŏlsan ŭl nŏmŭmyŏn" [Again going through one month and crossing the snowy mountains], acclaimed as one of the best short stories published in South Korea in the 2000s, takes the suicide of Pak Hyejŏng as a motif. The protagonist, a young man, struggles to solve the mystery of his lover's suicide. It is because he feels guilty about not being able to get involved in the death of his lover. The limitations of his love troubles him as his love failed to reach her loneliness and existential crisis. The young man perhaps possesses the characteristics of a typical suicide survivor. Eventually, he also commits suicide. Family, friends, or those who loved the person who committed suicide cannot help but take the words that the young person left and the unknowable reason of death as their *hwadu* for life. See Ch'ŏn Chŏnghwan [Jung-hwan Cheon], *Chasallon: Kot'ong kwa haesŏk sai esŏ* [Theory of suicide: Between pain and interpretation].

31. Hong Kwangsŏk, "1991-yŏn Kwangju owŏl sosa 2: Chaju, minju, t'ongil ŭi pulkkot Pak Sŭnghŭi" [A small history of 1991 Kwangju 2: Pak Sŭnghŭi, a flame of autonomy, democracy, and unification]. See also the magazine titled *Kwangju in* [People of Kwangju], which contains a series of articles about Pak Sŭnghŭi.

32. This is based on a testimony of Pak's father. For detailed information surrounding her death, see the collected works and documentaries the association produced in 2011. Pak Sŭnghŭi yŏlsa 20-chugi haengsa wiwŏnhoe, ed, *Haebang ŭi k'osŭmosŭ* [Cosmos of liberation].

33. Pak Sŭnghŭi yŏlsa 20-chugi haengsa wiwŏnhoe, ed, *Haebang ŭi k'osŭmosŭ*, 23. All three suicide notes are included in this collection.

34. Surprisingly, not many people committing suicide leave suicide notes, and even if one does, the recipients and the messages of the note, are in most cases, not clear. See Pak Hyŏngmin, "1997-yŏn-2006-yŏn yusŏ punsŏk kwa sot'ongjŏk chasal e kwanhan yŏn'gu" [An analysis of the suicide notes of 1997 to 2006 and a study of the communication-oriented suicide action].

35. Pak Sŭnghŭi yŏlsa 20-chugi haengsa wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Haebang ŭi k'osŭmosŭ*. Emphasis added by author.

36. Ibid., 242.

37. Ibid, 34.

38. Ibid., 50.

39. Ibid., 78.

40. Yi Ch'angŏn, "Punsin chasal ŭi kujo wa mek'ŏnijŭm yŏn'gu," 167.

41. Ibid.

42. The author Yi Ch'angŏn adds a comment that "the PD (People's Democracy) group's view of martyrdom did not differ significantly." As is well known, the NL and the PD are acronyms representing two major organizations/ideologies during the 1980s radical movement in South Korea. Yi's point is that both were similar in their attitudes toward martyrdom in ideology and in movement practices. Although the discussion above conflates nationalism and minjungism, the two groups had noticeable differences in the content of the doctrine and the way it was embraced. Yi Ch'angŏn, "Punsin chasal ŭi kujo wa mek'ŏnijŭm yon'gu," 165.

43. Kim Yŏnghwan, *Kangch'ŏl sŏsin* [Letters of Kangch'ŏl], 10.

44. This is, of course, an ambivalent mentality (*yanggajŏk simsŏng*). The NL group mobilized other kinds of emotional politics toward enemies or targets.

45. Pak Sŭnghŭi yŏlsa 20-chugi haengsa wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Haebang ŭi k'osŭmosŭ*, 241.

46. "Advance of Unification" was an era name used by activists to emphasize their ongoing struggle for the unification cause, ever since the US army began its occupation of southern Korea in 1945, leading to the permanent division of Korea into two nation-states. Year 47 of the era refers to 1991. In South Korea, in the past, a variety of era names were sometimes used in the place of the Anno Domini dating system. Pak Sŭnghŭi yŏlsa 20-chugi haengsa wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Haebang ŭi k'osŭmosŭ*, 9.

47. Paradoxically, as a result, activists were asked to concentrate on politics exclusively, and men (patriarchs) usually assume the leading role.

48. See the memorial address of Pak Sŭnghŭi's parents in Pak Sŭnghŭi yŏlsa 20-chugi haengsa wiwŏnhoe, ed., *Haebang ŭi k'osŭmosŭ*, 121–23.

49. This is from a work by an unnamed friend of Pak's, titled "Tongji rŭl saenggak hamyŏ: Pyŏngsang ilchi" [Thinking of my comrade: A sickbed journal entry].

50. See the testimonies of parents and friends in the documentary *Nae kasŭm sok ŭi k'osŭmosŭ* [Cosmos in my heart].

51. Thanatos refers to the death drive in Freudian psychoanalytic theory.

52. From a minjung folk song, titled "Ch'ingu" [Friend]. No Kisŏ, ed., *90-yŏn ŭl yŏnŭn norae: Kkottaji* [Songs that opened up the 1990s], 252.

53. Pak Hong, priest and President of Sŏgang University, argued that there are some "forces" behind the death of young people. While poet Kim Chiha, once a leader of the opposition movement, denounced the deaths of young students, saying they must discard the "ritual of death." See Youngju Ryu's chapter, "From Martyrdom to Apostasy," 287–314, in this volume. Both stood in the frontline of the ideological struggle and by doing so gained respect and a prestigious reputation from ultra-conservative forces.

54. In spite of several warnings, Prime Minister Chŏng Wŏnsik visited Hankuk University of Foreign Studies where student protesters threw eggs and flour at him. Several students were arrested, and the conservative media actively used the incident to highlight the "immorality" of student activists attacking an elder statesman. "Ŏttŏk'e irŏl su ka . . . ch'unggyŏk ŭi p'okhaeng" [How could they . . . a shocking attack].

55. Sŭllot'ŏdaik'ŭ P'etŏ [Sloterdijk, Peter], *Naengsojŏk isŏng pip'an* [A critique of cynical reason].

10

The Birth of an Ethical Subject : The 1980s and South Korean Literature

YOUNG CHAE SEO
Translated by YOUNGJU RYU

GUILT AND THE SPIRIT OF THE 1980s

In the intellectual history (*chŏngsinsa*) of twentieth-century Korea, the 1980s is nearly synonymous with the term "guilt." A decade that opened with the Kwangju Uprising (*Kwangju hangjaeng*) in May of its first year, the 1980s was baptized by the blood of those who died in that city resisting the military dictatorship of Chun Doo-hwan (Chŏn Tuhwan, 1980–88).[1] This baptism of blood was also a baptism of guilt for many who lived through the decade. Among those who did was one Mun Pusik, the arsonist sentenced to death for setting the American Cultural Center Korea in Pusan on fire in 1982.[2] Years later, Mun would recall this period in following terms:

> In my mind's eye, I can still see me, a shabby seminary student crouched on Songdo Beach in Pusan, tears streaming from his eyes. It wasn't that I had a particularly sharper sense of history or a more acute critical consciousness about the social reality than other people my age. I was just an ordinary seminary student, no more, no less—so why was it that I felt such pain? From 1980, for nearly twenty years, I was obsessed by a single event. Though I had never been to that city, a myriad of innocent people had died in a corner of the country I call home. It was probably this fact that wounded me so deeply, as it did other souls of the 1980s.[3]

How typical was Mun's case? In the above excerpt, Mun repeatedly refers to himself as an ordinary seminary student, but his actions suggest otherwise. The sense of guilt he felt over the Kwangju Uprising and the burden of debt

that he attempted to shoulder as his own may have been a product of an exceptional ethical sensibility.

We can also recall the case of the poet Hwang Chiu, who wrote and directed *Owŏl ŭi sinbu* (The bride of May), a play performed for ten days from May 18–May 27, 2000 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Kwangju Uprising. In this play, the air of tragedy and sacrality that envelops the Kwangju Uprising is itself enveloped in the guilt and shame of the survivors. Needless to say, Hwang is among these survivors, and the sentiments of guilt and shame are his as well. His case, however, may not be all that generalizable either. Born in Haenam, Hwang spent his adolescence in Kwangju. While this fact alone does not imply that a regional identity of sorts was at work in Hwang's creation of the play, it does suggest that his ties to the city may be of a more intimate (and therefore particular) nature than those that can be claimed by his contemporaries who may not have had a personal experience of growing up in Kwangju.

The situation changes, however, when we come to the end of the play and read the following lines in the essay appended to the play as a commentary, written by the literary critic Chŏng Kwari:

> Hovering behind the fate of Kwangju is the shameful fact that on the list of those who died in May of 1980, there was not a single soul whose profession it was to be "conscientious." (*The Bride of May* wove this fact in the form of a yearning.) Of those who had already made their way into the citadel and had no need to descend below, not a single soul was there. And I ask myself, where were you? Didn't you return to your boarding room from Seoul Station and watch a game of high school baseball on TV? Didn't you stay holed up in your room on the pretext that you had to finish your master's thesis? Where were you? The question pierces me still.[4]

In this statement by Chŏng, we can finally glimpse the impact of the Kwangju Uprising that may be generalizable. It displays neither the local connection seen in Hwang Chiu nor the exceptional ethical sensitivity manifested by Mun Pusik. To be sure, Chŏng's is a reminiscence of an event that takes place twenty years after the fact, but even if we were to erase those two decades, the sensibility could hardly grow stronger. To go back in time means

to approach the heart of the fire. In sum, a historical tragedy unfolding in a place and time not far away has, in and of itself, a powerful ethical resonance.

This chapter examines the relationship between the Kwangju Uprising and the sense of guilt that became the pervasive spirit of the time in the event's aftermath. While the evidence of this connection is not the kind that can be verified through any indices or measured in numbers, if we must still speak of the existence of this guilt, the reason is because without it, we would not be able to understand the nature of the Kwangju Uprising as a fulcrum in the *zeitgeist* of the 1980s. How did consciousness of guilt become the mechanism of subject-formation, and what symbolic position did the Kwangju Uprising occupy within this mechanism?

In order to approach these questions, it is first necessary to understand the nature of the Kwangju Uprising beyond the familiar frame of state violence and resistance to that violence. Until 1988, when the highly unusual composition of the Thirteenth National Assembly—the opposition party had gained the majority—allowed "the Kwangju hearings" to finally take place and the words "Kwangju Democratization movement" to appear in official government documents for the first time, the state held that the "incident in Kwangju" was a riot caused by thugs at the instigation of "impure elements" in Korean society.[5] Throughout most of the decade, with the press muffled by martial law and the government of the Fifth Republic, individuals gave up their lives or braved imprisonment in order to expose the truth of Kwangju.[6] "If not an insignificant number of us went to jail or even met our death in the 1980s for talking about Kwangju," wrote Mun Pusik, "it was not some grandiose sense of historical mission that motivated us, but the simple fact that in May of 1980, we did not run to Kwangju but chose instead to remain silent."[7] In other words, the problem of Kwangju became properly problematic when its history was covered up and distorted. Within the temporal gap that separated the actual event and its official recognition, complex structures of feeling emerged. It is for this reason that we can speak of guilt in relation to the Kwangju Uprising.

Nor did the official recognition, when it did finally come, settle the matter of culpability once and for all. President Chun Doo-hwan was finally brought to trial after much difficulty and received a life sentence from the Supreme Court of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in 1995, but the person responsible for giving the order to open fire on citizens was never revealed. In the end, the

state's position confirmed, through the court's decision, that no one individual could be held responsible. Immediately after Kwangju, the state had simply denied that anything of consequence had happened—it was just some thugs raising hell, whipped into action by the usual miscreants and spies from the North. Then the state said that it was not possible to know exactly what happened. Finally, it concluded that something had happened, but that something had taken place in highly exceptional circumstances for which no one could be held responsible. The drama of the state's successive denials and the open-endedness of the deaths that resulted from these denials endowed Kwangju with an intense affective energy.

In sum, the Kwangju Uprising was an event that came into being through a double refraction in representation. It arose in the first instance from the distortion, misinformation, and concealment that accompanied the government's official determination that the event was caused by an armed thuggery of rioters and false rumors spread by the impure elements of society. This representation invited in response intense anger and a desire for revenge. The Kwangju Uprising was thus subjected to another round of representation, which sought to combat the government's determination of the nature of the event by filtering it through an intense emotional response. For this reason, with regards to the Kwangju Uprising, there are few who can claim impunity by pleading ignorance. This is precisely what made Kwangju so special. To have stood by or fled from the event for one reason or another, in full knowledge of what was happening there, would make one feel guilty, of course. To have remained silent about the event after finding out about it could also make one feel guilty. But about Kwangju, even the fact that one failed to actively seek out the knowledge of what happened, or that one remained utterly ignorant, damned one as unethical. Such was the unique ethical status that the Kwangju Uprising had in the 1980s.

Through analyses of literary texts that engage with the ethical dilemma of Kwangju in important ways, this chapter approaches in three specific steps the relationship between the Kwangju Uprising and the emergence of the 1980s' ethical subject as a conscience racked by guilt. First, it examines the meaning of the guilt inscribed in the 1980s' spirit. Second, it traces the way this guilt leads to the process of subject-formation. Finally, it interrogates the significance of such subject-formation for Korean intellectual history more broadly. To state the conclusion first, it is only by making the passage through

the dark tunnel of guilt that one (a spirit) becomes a proper subject. The subject thus born is first and foremost an ethical subject in the sense that it claims the domain of its own responsibility. It is also a collective subject in that it discovers solidarity in claiming such responsibility.

Central to our examination will be Im Ch'ŏru's (Lim Chul-woo) novel of 2004, *Paengnyŏn yŏgwan* (The Century Inn), a text that contains within it the drama of the subject's birth from the ethico-political context created by the 1980s. To those who might object to seeing a novel published in 2004 as the articulation of the very pith of the 1980s' spirit, we can respond in two ways. First, we can reflect on the nature of the novel as a literary genre. The novel, like philosophy, is the genre of twilight, not the genre of high noon. It captures the spirit of the times only after the era has passed its apogee and neared its demise. Thus, there is always a time lag between the spirit of the times and the novel that expresses it. The second fact to consider is that *The Century Inn* is a novel by Im Ch'ŏru. From his debut in 1981 to the publication of the monumental *Pomnal* (Spring days) in 1998, Im focused on the Kwangju problem with the singleness of purpose that no other writer could match. Where Kwangju is concerned, Im is a writer who occupies a privileged position, and *The Century Inn* is a text that allows us to trace how the writer's creative drive emerged.

A peculiar feature of modern Korean literature from Yi Kwangsu on down to Ch'oe Inhun (Choi In-hun) is the prominence of the ethical position we might describe as "guilt without guilt" and "responsibility without sin," that is to say, the writers' deep investment in characters who make themselves guilty for an offense they have not committed and who attempt to take responsibility for what they have not done. To the extent that this peculiarity can be connected to the search for a modern subjectivity—the connection will become more apparent in the last section of this chapter—Im stands in a genealogy that continues from these earlier writers. In *The Century Inn*, a novel that gives the impression of being the last title in Im's career-long examination of the Kwangju Uprising, Im finds concrete content with which to fill the empty place created by guilt. Coming to the 1980s, the search for a modern subjectivity reaches a definite anchoring point over the word "democratization," concretized through the June Uprising of 1987.[8] Democratization redefined human beings as subjects of "action," in Hannah Arendt's sense of the term, rather than as slaves forced to "labor" or artisans engaged in their

"work" in order to survive.[9] Moreover, as it became a collective cause, democratization provided a vision of social modernity alternative to that of capitalist development. Pushing the question of what it means to be a human being beyond the realm of necessity, democratization enabled the interrogation not of life as a given but of the reason for living. Only by locating oneself in this realm beyond necessity could the human animal emerge as something more than simply a primate that has shed its fur or a mere "survival machine" for its genes—that is to say, a human subject.

ETHICS BETWEEN TWO DEATHS: YUN SANGWŎN AND PAK KWANHYŎN

There can be little disagreement over the fact that the 1980s in South Korea was defined by two political events: the Kwangju Uprising in May of 1980 and the June Uprising (*Yuwŏl hangjaeng*) of 1987. If the former represents the point of departure, the latter characterizes the point of culmination; if one symbolizes death, the other embodies resurrection. Separated by the space of seven years, the June Uprising reprises the tragedy of the Kwangju Uprising in the deaths of Pak Chongch'ŏl (1964–87) and Yi Hanyŏl (1967–87). Pak Chongch'ŏl, a native of Pusan and a student of Seoul National University, died after being subjected to waterboarding by the police. His death shows us how the ghosts of "the questionable dead" were born. Yi Hanyŏl, a native of Kwangju and a student of Yonsei University, was fatally wounded when a teargas canister shot by the riot police hit him in the head during a protest. His death shows the fatal inner nature of the 1980s' anti-government resistance.[10] The overlapping of these two deaths in 1987 gave birth to "the space between two deaths," a special space filled with the intensity of the tautest possible ethical tension.

In Lacanian usage, the space between two deaths is a space that has not yet been fixed symbolically—latent in it, therefore, is the violent turbulence of affect. The subject within that turbulence feels caught between a death that has already come and a death that has not yet arrived. In other words, the subject may be physically undead, but the death of another which has already occurred suffuses the subject's being so intensely that it is no longer quite alive. The burden of debt that the not-yet-dead feels toward the already-dead lies at the heart of this affective structure. For example, when Pak Chongch'ŏl

died in January of 1987, Yi Hanyŏl became the Pak Chongch'ŏl that still lives. To the extent that Yi Hanyŏl feels Pak Chongch'ŏl's death as his own, or at least to the extent that Yi cannot think of Pak's death as the death of an "other," Pak's death opens up for Yi Hanyŏl a space suffused by the death that is not yet here. This is also the space of the sublime. In this chapter, "ethics between two deaths" refers to the intense ethical tension that fills this space of duality. Its meaning is confirmed clearly when the second death takes place of the first and reanimates the meaning of the first death. If the emancipatory politics of the 1980s in South Korea drew power from ethical pathos, we find at the heart of this pathos an ethical tension born of the space between two deaths.[11]

In this sense, we might say that the ethics between two deaths comprised the single most potent force that guided the entire 1980s. The dynamic surrounding the two deaths in 1987 had already been anticipated in a striking form in the deaths of two young men occasioned by the Kwangju Uprising: Yun Sangwŏn (1950–80) and Pak Kwanhyŏn (1953–82).[12] In 1980, Pak Kwanhyŏn was the most popular of Kwangju's student leaders, the brightest of the stars that emerged in the space of democracy that had opened up after the assassination of Park Chung Hee (Pak Chŏnghŭi, 1961–79) on October 26, 1979. Not only was Pak the student body president of the prestigious Chonnam University, he had been noted for his exceptional oratorical skills at the mass rallies taking place in the provincial capitol square. As a symbol of democracy in the Kwangju area, Pak Kwanhyŏn earned the epithet, "Kwangju's native son." In contrast, Yun Sangwŏn did not belong to the group of prominent leaders within the democratization movement, despite the very important role he had played in the youth movement. Because he was not a college student in 1980, and because he had never been arrested or imprisoned as a dissident during the 1970s, he was not rounded up along with other various student leaders and political figures when martial law was declared over the entire country at midnight on May 17, 1980. Yun operated below the police's radar and had no reason to fear that he would be one of the names marked for detention. So, he stayed in Kwangju and ended up walking into the heart of the uprising. He stayed to the end, guarding the site of history that the provincial capitol had become, and was shot to death by the martial law army on the last day of the resistance.[13] Yun thus became a cenotaph attesting to the tragedy of Kwangju.

In the early dawn of May 27, 1987 as 8,700 heavily armed ROK Army soldiers marched behind a procession of tanks toward the three hundred citizens who still occupied the provincial capitol, it should have been Pak Kwanhyŏn rather than Yun Sangwŏn guarding the capitol, a building that had become so symbolic for the uprising. If someone had to die there as a witness to the tragedy, it should have been Pak, not Yun. At least that is how things would have appeared from Pak Kwanhyŏn's perspective. The two men shared many special bonds. Yun had preceded Pak at Chonnam University by a few years. Both had come from poor rural areas, and because of the emotional and financial investments that they had received from their families, they had both felt a special responsibility for the economic welfare of their kin. It was this responsibility that had led both men to decide to join the system, despite the anger they felt toward the Yusin regime's obscene use of power. Yun Sangwŏn took a job at a bank in Seoul after graduating from college, and Pak Kwanhyŏn majored in law and started preparing for the bar. Ultimately, however, the men could not ignore the political reality, which often verged on the farcical. Yun Sangwŏn returned to Kwangju, threw himself into the labor movement, and started the night-school movement. Pak Kwanhyŏn, torn between his obligation to his own family and the cause of social justice, finally decided to devote himself to the latter and run for president of the Chonnam University student council. Attending the election in a banker's suit that Yun Sangwŏn had lent him, Pak won the election.

But even if we were to ignore such poignant details about the personal connections between the two men, what Yun Sangwŏn's death would have meant to Pak Kwanhyŏn is obvious simply from the positions the two men occupied within the matrix of the Kwangju Uprising. Yun Sangwŏn, as the spokesman for the citizens' army that occupied the provincial capitol, met his death resisting the martial law army to the end. Pak Kwanhyŏn, the student body president of Chonnam University, fled Kwangju before the outbreak of the violence on May 18, knowing that his name would be on the top of the list of individuals that the government would try to arrest preemptively. The moment Yun Sangwŏn died in the provincial capitol among the last to be "quelled," Pak Kwanhyŏn's life ended too in a sense, though it would take another two years for his actual death to come. Pak Kwanhyŏn's life on the run ended on April 5, 1982, and he died in prison on October 12, 1982 while on a hunger strike. The manner in which Pak died shows us in a symbolic

fashion what Yun's death meant to Pak. Pak's death in prison was simply an enactment of the death that had already come to him with Yun's death. That is to say, for nearly two years, Pak was dead though physically alive, and Yun was alive though physically dead. The two men had existed together in the space between two deaths. It was Pak's will that had created such a space, a space at once bizarre and sublime in which a body and soul separated from each other continued on in strange symbiosis.

As people perished in Kwangju while he was running from the authorities, it was in this space that Pak Kwanhyŏn locked himself up, of his own accord. The news of Yun's death only sealed Pak's fate in this space. The actual death that came to Pak two years later as he starved himself to death in prison was, therefore, a settling of the debt long owed, a physical taking up of the place that he had already been occupying for some time, in order to finally become one with Yun Sangwŏn. (While Pak did not give himself up to the police, he did not resist the arrest, and though he did not commit suicide per se, he did not reject the road to death.) This dynamic did not apply exclusively to Pak. To South Koreans of the 1980s who acknowledged democracy as a legitimate value, those sacrificed in Kwangju in 1980 such as Yun Sangwŏn baptized them with guilt and left them indebted. This is true even though for many, it was only after 1988 and the end of Chun Doo-hwan's presidency that they learned through the now ungagged press the reality of what happened in the Kwangju Uprising.

For this reason, I would argue that the space between deaths does not disappear with the death of Pak Kwanhyŏn. Anyone baptized by guilt can be imprisoned in this space with the knowledge that they are alive though they should not be, a knowledge that is itself a kind of death. This space thus gives birth to countless ghosts. In their own way, both Pak Chongch'ŏl and Yi Hanyŏl occupied the place of Pak Kwanhyŏn for a time. So, did young men like Kim Ŭigŭi and Kim T'aehun, whose self-immolations brought them from the place of Pak Kwanhyŏn to the place of Yun Sangwŏn. In sum, the place of Pak Kwanhyŏn who defers becoming Yun Sangwŏn—this is the place of the living corpse at the heart of the ethical pathos in 1980s' Korea. The gravitational pull of this place was such that everyone who emerged on the other side of the decade with their physical body still intact became, in a manner of speaking, "Yun Sangwŏn who still lives."

GUILT AND FEAR: IM CH'ŎRU AND HAN CH'ANGHUN

Like the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, the truth of the Kwangju Uprising was dangerous to consume in the 1980s. Accompanying the forbidden truth was the inevitable question, "Where were you at the time?" The question's weight grew even greater after the truth of the Kwangju Uprising became widely known through the media in 1988. The ethical predicament occasioned by the question demanded of the survivors of the era that they provide an alibi for their being. We see the crystallization of this demand in Hwang Chiu's poem called "Yun Sangwŏn."[14] In the voice of Yun, the poem ends with the line, "I'll see you soon." Reportedly the last words of Yun Sangwŏn as he perished in Kwangju, the final line is, in point of fact, entirely a product of Hwang Chiu's imagination. Thus, Hwang Chiu borrows here the mouth of the dying Yun Sangwŏn to talk back to Yun, as if to tell him, "Wait for me there. I'll follow you soon." In ventriloquizing Yun, Hwang Chiu was enunciating from the position of "Pak Kwanhyŏn, the not-yet-dead."

That the burden of the Kwangju Uprising weighed heavily on Hwang Chiu—Hwang was of the same generation as Yun Sangwŏn and Pak Kwanhyŏn, and a graduate of a high school in Kwangju as well—can be seen clearly in the poetry collections that made him a literary star in the 1980s. For an example, we need to look no further than "Observing Silence, 5 minutes 27 seconds" (Mungnyŏm, 5-pun 27-ch'o), published at the height of political oppression during the Chun Doo-hwan regime. Consisting of nothing save the title and a blank page, the poem has been read as an example of the aesthetic avant-garde, but the work should rather be read as an expression of the poet's desire to draw attention to Kwangju in a time of severe censorship. By using the numbers that correspond to the date the provincial capitol fell to the martial law army, 5.27, the poet commemorated Kwangju in a coded fashion.[15] The Kwangju Uprising and the political oppression that followed twisted Hwang's poetry. It was by enduring the weight of this burden that Hwang emerged as a real poet, like steel tempered by fire. For Hwang Chiu, Kwangju was both his original sin and the womb of his poetry.

In a much more explicit way, Hwang returned to the subject of Kwangju in 2000. As mentioned earlier, Hwang staged his play *The Bride of May* at Seoul Arts Center on the twentieth anniversary of the Kwangju Uprising for exactly ten days, the duration of the uprising from its outbreak on May 18 to the

complete defeat of the citizens' army on May 27. The two main characters of the play, though renamed Kim Hyŏnsik and Kang Hyŏk and presented as rivals in love, are actually Yun Sangwŏn and Pak Kwanhyŏn. One died during the uprising while the other survived it to face agony. The two men's conflict is framed by the perspectives of those who have survived—a man who goes mad in the fire pit of Kwangju and another racked by the shame of having survived. Such framing reveals the absolute essence of the play: a ceremony for the dead in the form of a sacred wedding, performed by the guilt-ridden living. In this sense, *The Bride of May* is an expression of the ethics of survival, and it became Hwang's way of shouldering his portion of the responsibility.

The burden was not Hwang's alone, of course. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the awareness of this debt became the defining characteristic of the 1980s' literature in Korea, so deeply did it permeate the consciousness of the writers. To be sure, there was a broad spectrum in both the intensity of the awareness and the diversity of attitudes for manifesting it—including an extreme sense of guilt and shame, vengeance, and cynicism—but a writer could rarely be free from it altogether. The structure of feeling engendered by the Kwangju Uprising and its aftermath had become the very core of the 1980s' spirit expressed in Korean literature.

If Hwang Chiu was the poet whose works manifested this spirit most persistently, Hwang's counterpart in the genre of fiction was undoubtedly Im Ch'ŏru. The first fiction writer to write about Kwangju, Im produced a number of works that engaged the event in an allegorical mode, but his definitive contribution came in 1998 in the form of a five-volume magnum opus called *Spring Days*. The novel gives a detailed testimony of the ten days of the Kwangju Uprising through the viewpoints of three groups of people: university students, citizens of Kwangju, and soldiers in the martial law army. The most central of these voices is that of Yun Sangwŏn (thinly disguised as Yun Sanghyŏn in the novel). Depicting Yun's death at the very end of the novel, Im Ch'ŏru wrote from the place of Pak Kwanhyŏn, the not-yet-dead, as Hwang Chiu would go on to do in *The Bride of May*. *Spring Days* was Im Ch'ŏru's way of settling his debt. He acknowledged this debt explicitly in a piece published in 1998 almost immediately after the completion of *Spring Days*:

> And so I come finally to the end of this shoddy, miserable confession. During those ten days, I could not do anything. While my friends and colleagues

> perished in the very heart of the fire, I fled to save my skin, not once but twice. And when the dawn broke on the last day, I shut myself up in my room with a blanket over my head and cried, within earshot of the gunfire, within earshot also of the call for help by that female student. After that day, how could I forgive myself? How could I seek reconciliation or consolation? I won't deny it—it's that sense of guilt and shame that led me to write *Spring Days*. Was the book my way of trying to compensate for the past? To redeem myself, to seek forgiveness? Flagellating myself constantly, didn't I hold obsessively on to this. . .[16]

We can discuss an additional context to this confession. The above excerpt comes from a short piece, which was published in the literary quarterly *Munhak tongne* (Literature town) in its special feature section called "autobiographical fiction" (*chajŏn sosŏl*). A peculiar and esoteric genre to say the least, autobiographical fiction was, in essence, the space of institutionalized confession. By offering selected writers the chance to write their autobiography in the form of fiction, what the journal forced out of these writers was a confession. The point of interest for the readers of the journal lay in how skillfully and distinctively the writers handled the pressure of being thrust into this space. Im Ch'ŏru responded to the pressure with extreme honesty, pouring out a confession regarding the Kwangju Uprising hot enough to make the paper "shrivel and blaze at every touch of the fiery pen," to borrow Edgar Allan Poe's famous phrasing.[17] The ethical significance of this intensity becomes clearer when we juxtapose Im's piece to another that revived the memories of Kwangju. The following excerpt comes from Han Ch'anghun's contribution to *Munhak tongne*'s autobiographical fiction feature, published a year after Im's.

> We walked, supporting his weight. In an utter daze, he began to move his feet, letting them fall where we guided them. I didn't realize what was going on until his head began to droop with excruciating slowness, as if in slow motion. I held him by the scruff of his neck. His head turned toward mine. He looked no more than fifteen, sixteen at best, a docile looking kid with glasses and a round face. I recognized him as a kid who had stood next to me. The bullet had come at a ninety-degree angle. It had grazed me and entered the kid whose shoulder was touching mine, at the very spot where

> his shoulder met his back. I began to shiver. It was then that my eyes met his. There was nothing in those eyes. All I saw was utter blankness in his pupils. Or maybe they were full, but of nothing.
>
> I began to run. People were lined up on the streets and there was a car enveloped in flames amid sounds of wheezing bullets and billows of black smoke all around. Everything looked unrealistic like a scene in a faded old photograph. Thousands of bullets blanketed the sky, wheezing past at regular intervals. Then all at once, the bullets changed directions and came at me.
>
> A delusion, surely, but also a reality. A paralyzing fear took hold of me, making it difficult to walk. All the people staring at me looked like bullets, or the ghosts of the already dead waiting for the gates of hell to open. There was no one in the alley. I was there alone with the bullets.
>
> Arriving at my boardinghouse, which was completely empty, I locked the door behind me and covered my head with a blanket. The bullets continued to follow me. I finally realized what a folly of youth it was to seek in disasters a kind of entertainment. My bones began to ache. Death, at last, was upon me.
>
> Someone knocked. Shivering, I opened the door. It was a bullet. With a swishing sound, it flew by me and buried itself in a wall. In this whole wide world, there was only me and this bullet. The shining mouth of a gun was aimed at my head, at my heart. Like a bug doused with insecticide or crushed under a merciless foot, I wriggled.[18]

What Han Ch'anghun confesses to here is the fear of death. According to this autobiographical fiction, Han was an eleventh grader in Kwangju at the time of the Uprising. As a young man on the cusp of adulthood, he had gotten involved in the Uprising without knowing what it would entail. He had tasted blood and encountered death in the raw as a witness to the massacre.

Thus, perhaps by coincidence, the autobiographical fiction feature of *Munhak tongne* became the venue for two confessions about the Kwangju Uprising within the space of one year. Matched in their intensity, the two confessions revolve around extraordinary experiences. To Im Ch'ŏru, it was clear as day what this experience was all about—guilt and shame. In Han

Ch'anghun's case, however, fear took the place of these affects. Fear is the proof that Han was at the very vanguard of the action during the Uprising, close enough to death to smell it and feel the splatter of blood. In that regard, Han Ch'anghun's confession, though it appears as an expression of fear, could be read at the same time as a record of pride at having been present at the site of conflict, rather than as a record of shame at having been absent. Han Ch'anghun's experience of Kwangju is thus qualitatively different from the more mature Im Ch'ŏru's (Im is eight years older than Han). Indeed, in terms of the stance of the subject toward that experience, we might locate the two confessions at the opposite ends of the affective spectrum.

The themes touched upon briefly in these works of autobiographical fiction find their full novelization later in Im's *The Century Inn* and Han Ch'anghun's *Kkot ŭi nara* (A country of flowers, 2011) respectively. In the case of Han Ch'anghun, the novel is the only one he ever wrote about the Kwangju Uprising. In contrast, we can locate Im's *The Century Inn* in a continuous line from *Spring Days*, or his entire career as a writer from his debut in 1981 for that matter. Given this difference, as well as the different aspirations of the texts, a simple comparison of the two works will not be productive. But what we can note usefully is the different existential weight of the writers revealed in the two works. Han Ch'anghun experienced Kwangju as a warrior, an immature young man with nothing to fear, while Im Ch'ŏru experienced it in his late twenties as a coward who fled the site of conflict, unable to bear the weight of existence that threatened to annihilate him. This cowardice gave birth to guilt, and the guilt squeezed out of him monumental works about Kwangju. If we are concerned in this chapter not with the question of bravery or cowardice but with guilt, this is because the realm of ethics proper opens up not with the initial experience of a given moment, but with what afterwards fills the space created by that experience.

As suggested in the dysphemistic title "Pyŏnt'ae" (Perversion), the fear of death Han Ch'anghun describes is connected to the problem of adolescent male sexuality. The way this fear encounters the erotic is close to an aesthetic impulse and thus occupies a plane different from ethics. In contrast, what Im described as the cowardly action of fleeing to save his skin "not once but twice" opens up a thoroughly ethical dimension. It is in the time lag between the first retreat and its repetition, as well as between the event and its recollection that the question of the ethical can be contemplated. This is true both

of Im's autobiographical fiction "Naksŏ, kil e taehayŏ" (Scribbles, about roads), hereafter "Scribbles," and of the novel *The Century Inn*.

Like Im in his autobiographical fiction, Yi Chinu, the narrator of *The Century Inn* confesses to betraying his friend twice. (The friend is identified as K in *The Century Inn* and P in "Scribbles"). The betrayal takes place during the brief interval when the retreat of the martial law army in face of the fierce resistance by the citizens had left Kwangju a liberated city temporarily. The narrator's friend, active in the citizens' army, invites the narrator to meet up with him. The call thrusts the narrator into an awful dilemma. He expects his friend to invite him to join the citizens' army, and while his own rage toward the brutal martial law army is great, the narrator cannot help but hesitate when the matter becomes one of picking up a weapon against the government. He does in the end go to the bookstore where he had agreed to meet his friend, but the friend does not show up. The narrator comes back to his refuge, sighing with relief that his friend didn't show. His friend, however, calls him again, and they agree to meet, this time in front of a busy public building. While waiting for his friend in the crowd, the narrator begins to feel the dilemma again, and when the friend finally drives up in a Jeep, the following scene ensues:

(a) "Scribbles"

> In spite of myself, I found myself preparing for another round of betrayal. Two hours passed as I asked myself the same questions over and over again. Then I saw a Jeep approaching with P in the front seat. In the backseat were two young men with rifles. Because of the crowd in front of the building, the Jeep couldn't approach any closer. It idled for a while, likely looking for me, then turned a corner and disappeared.
>
> The Jeep had stopped twenty, maybe thirty meters from where I was. I could have called out my friend's name, but I didn't, remaining in my seat to the end. During that minute, perhaps even less than that, what went through my mind? Did I want him to find me and walk toward me? Wasn't I actually hoping for the opposite to take place? On that day too, as I had done previously, I came back home alone. For the second time, I had betrayed P, actually, myself.[19]

(b) *The Century Inn*

> Two hours after the appointed time, a military Jeep appeared before the building. In the front seat sat K in a light brown jacket, and in the backseat two young men holding rifles. Because of the crowd gathered there, the Jeep couldn't advance any farther and came to a full stop. K scrambled up, looking around for you, just a few meters from where you were standing. Had you lifted your hand, K would have spotted you. But even so, you couldn't call out his name. For some reason, you couldn't do anything but look at him, as if rooted to the spot. In time, K gave up and sat back down. The Jeep turned around and drove back the way it came.
>
> A minute? Two minutes? At least a minute for sure. What went through your head during that moment? Even now, you can't remember. Did you want him to find you and come to you first? Or could it have been the opposite in reality?[20]

In both works, what becomes clear from the context is that the narrator actually did not want the friend to discover him while remaining resigned to the fact that he would be spotted. In that sense, the narrator was doubly cowardly. He did not commit himself to the greater cause actively. At the same time, he secured for himself a moral alibi by showing up and leaving it to his friend to discover him. The most important mission that Im Ch'ŏru gave himself after completing *Spring Days* was to confess this cowardice. He made this confession "not once but twice," reprising the piece first written under the pressure to meet the journal's deadline as a significant episode in a full-fledged novel six years later.

The similarity between the two works excerpted above is obvious, but the effect of the ethical interrogation is much stronger in (b) due to the use of the second-person narrator. From one to the other, the nature of the cowardly act has not changed, but the viewpoint that examines that act has become much sterner. The harshness of self-interrogation in the second version paradoxically suggests that the writer has found a way of coping with the ethical dilemma; in the dark abyss of ethical interrogation he found his own way to emerge as a subject. This will be the topic of the next section, but for now, we can ask regarding the "cowardice" described here whether Im Ch'ŏru was

alone in succumbing to it. As a matter of fact, we could argue that the truly exceptional stance to be the one taken not by Im but by Yun Sangwŏn. In *Spring Days*, the last confession of the character modeled after Yun reveals the decision to become the cannon fodder of the martial law army rather than have the history of their just resistance against state violence come to nothing. If someone has to die to become a monument of the resistance, Yun resolves, let it be me. How many of us would be able to take such a heroic stance? Whether for the simple fear of death or the futility of dying in resistance, or on account of the moral dilemma of exercising violence against the national army, the more common response would be the one that Im took—to stand a step removed from the line of the massacre and shed painful tears of guilt and self-hate in earshot of the martial army's gunfire at the last of the citizens' army holding fort at the province capitol.

Safety—or impunity—in numbers, however, is not a luxury that Im allowed himself. Judging his action to be unethical and cowardly, the writer accepted that cowardice as his responsibility, as his own particular form of guilt. From the ground fertilized by this guilt, accompanied by the shame of having failed to answer the call of the greater cause, Im was reborn as a subject. From "Kae toduk," ("Dog thief," 1981), his very first story, Im's fiction has been characterized precisely by this guilt and shame, and by overflowing sorrow and rage over the social reality. Here, once again, a comparison with Han Ch'anghun proves instructive. Encountering Kwangju, the younger writer felt fear of death, but this fear became the occasion for experiencing the erotic impulse that undergirds life. Han Ch'anghun's may be seen as representing the sensibility of the 1990s. Im, by contrast, is the preeminent 1980s' writer to the extent that he refused to leave the space of guilt created by the non-coincidence of two deaths. No South Korean writer explored the contours of this space as intimately and as persistently as Im did. Indeed, for Im, the ethics between two deaths attained the level of the drive.

SUBJECT-FORMATION THROUGH GUILT: IM CH'ŎRU AND PAK HYOSŎN

The unique composition of *The Century Inn* reveals how guilt attains the status of the universal in Im Ch'ŏru's fiction. The novel threads together several historical traumas that took place in Korea in the second half of the twentieth

century. An individual who is preoccupied with his guilt can only see his own universe, and not the world that exists beyond it. Making his passage through his own wound, he emerges into the world beyond and gains a set of eyes with which to see countless others—scarred, guilty, ashamed, and wretched—walking around in the everyday world. The moment he gladly joins this humanity, and only then, can he become the subject of the world. To put this process in Hegelian terms, the unhappy self-consciousness goes through the stage of objective reason to advance to the level of the spirit that moves the community. From the perspective of objective reason, all guilty conscience is "absurd," but it is this "absurdity" that becomes the very core of the subjectivity that moves the self.[21] When the subject realizes both the absurdity and inevitability of guilt, and moves toward reconciliation with the world, the subject also comes to realize that its wound has already been healed. That is to say, the wound comes to realize its own absurdity; the wound is a wound only when it's gazing at itself.

But we must not overlook the important fact that such a realization comes not through the lonely waiting of an ascetic meditating before a wall but as a consequence of moving away from guilt at the level of an individual consciousness toward the level of action. This level is called responsibility, that is to say, social responsibility. *The Century Inn* narrates precisely this process of subject-formation.

The life stories of three characters, each deeply scarred by a historical event of national importance, form the plot of *The Century Inn*. Kang Poksu's family was sacrificed during the April 3 Uprising of 1948 in Cheju. Kang was further victimized when "guilt by association" prevented him from pursuing a career in law even after he had passed the bar exam. Kang is forced to live the monkish life of an ascetic as a result. The second character, Kim Yoan, whose real name is Yi Chaedong, had his family killed by the state during the so-called National Guidance League Massacres in August of 1950. Kim, orphaned after being forced to witness the brutal rape and murder of his mother, is sent to the US as a war orphan. He suffers from amnesia and bouts of neurosis caused by the past trauma. Finally, there is the fiction writer Yi Chinu, the main character of the novel, whose story unfolds around the Kwangju Uprising of 1980, as we already saw. Yi Chinu suffers from the deep sense of guilt over his failure to participate in the Kwangju Uprising and his betrayal of his friend in the resistance. To these portraits of historical victim-

ization the novel adds a fourth account, which is told from the perspective of a perpetrator. Hŏ Munt'ae, a disabled Vietnam War veteran, lives in pain caused not only by his physical injury but also by the memory of his own violence during the war.

In December of 1999, all four characters gather on a fictive island called Yŏngdo off Korea's southern coast. Kang Poksu and Hŏ Munt'ae are brothers-in-law and manage the Century Inn together. Kim Yoan comes to stay at the inn as a guest in search of his lost memories, whereas Yi Chinu hopes to track down the friend he had betrayed in search of atonement. The two guests are drawn to the inn from Seattle and from Seoul, respectively, not as a mere coincidence but by a voice that commands them to return now that the time has come. At Yŏngdo, a shaman named Choch'ŏdaek performs the ritual for consoling the dead. While this marriage of magical realism and shamanism creates a supernatural center of gravity at Yŏngdo, a more fundamental force drives the novel at the metanarrative level. That force, glimpsed in the novel's preface and epilogue, is the writer's existential guilt. Fiction-writing provides an escape from this guilt.

The point of view becomes a crucial narrative device. The two sections of the novel devoted to Yi Chinu's story proceed in the second-person perspective. As briefly noted earlier, the second-person perspective, combined with Yi Chinu's guilty conscience toward his friend K, creates an intensely accusatory mood of interrogation. Yi Chinu, the fiction writer in *The Century Inn*, is thus motivated by the same desire that led Im Ch'ŏru to write "Scribbles," but *The Century Inn* goes one step further. Im's confession in "Scribbles" of his own cowardice which he had kept secret for so long was at the same time the writer's plea for forgiveness from his friend. But what happens if that friend passes away before such a moment of atonement arrives? This is the painful scenario that Yi Chinu in *The Century Inn* faces. His friend K had survived the final bloodbath at the provincial capitol. After several years on the run, K was arrested and imprisoned, and then released from the prison after receiving a special pardon. He then devoted himself to the theater movement as a means of letting the world know the truth about Kwangju. The year that Yi Chinu published his novel about Kwangju, K passed away from cancer.

Yi Chinu's stated reason for coming to the Century Inn is to retrace the memory of this friend K, who had stayed in the inn before passing away. Of course, visiting the inn does not change the fact that with K gone, there is no

one who can now forgive Yi Chinu for his betrayal. Knowing that there is no one who can grant him the forgiveness he seeks, Yi Chinu still travels to the Century Inn, revealing thereby the depth and sincerity of his sense of guilt. Guilt, reaching its very unendurable limit, attains a level of authenticity that paves the way for redemption. Redemption comes when least expected, like a thief in the night.

It is this drama of self-redemption that makes *The Century Inn* so notable. The drama also reveals how the subject is formed through the avowal of guilt. Yi Chinu, who travels to Yŏngdo to retrace K's steps, comes face to face with K's secret. K too had felt guilt and agony. Through a woman named Sunok, Yi Chinu learns that K had managed to survive the Kwangju Uprising by escaping the provincial capitol in the middle of the night before the fateful final dawn, escorting some dozen female students. Sunok had been one of those students. At Yŏngdo, where he had sought his friend's trace, Yi Chinu thus comes to realize that K must have suffered from the same sense of guilt that he himself had felt on account of K. Listening to Sunok, Yi Chinu mutters:

> Ah, so it was like that. But why, why in the world did you have to harbor this absurd guilt? When everyone, their heads held high and their backs to the past, have gone on their way, why was it that you, this noble spirit, had to assume this suffering until the very last moment of your life? You should have been the one consoled.[22]

Yi Chinu bursts into this lament right after watching the broadcast of Chun Doo-hwan's release from prison. Though the former dictator had been sentenced for life for his crimes, he was pardoned at the cusp of the new millennium in the name of reconciliation. The historical context allows us to read this lament of Yi Chinu's as directed not only at K but at himself as well, and by extension, the writer of *The Century Inn*, Im Ch'ŏru.

"I dedicate this novel," wrote Im Ch'ŏru in the epilogue of the novel, "to my departed friend Pak Hyosŏn."[23] Pak Hyosŏn was the friend who appeared as P in "Scribbles" and as K in *The Century Inn*. Though not as famous as Yun Sangwŏn, Pak Hyosŏn is not an unfamiliar name to anyone who has read the basic documents of the Kwangju Uprising. Pak was a central member of two citizens' organizations that played key roles in the Kwangju resistance: Prairie Fire Night School and theater troupe Kwangdae. Pak was also a member of

the leadership of the citizens' army and was in charge of publicity. His history mirrors that of K given in *The Century Inn*: post-Kwangju life on the run, arrest and trial, prison term, pardon and release, and involvement in the theater movement. As the leader of the theater troupe T'obagi, Pak Hyosŏn produced plays such as *Kŭmhŭi ŭi owŏl* (Kŭmhŭi's May), *Morankkot* (Peony), and *Kŭdae ege ponaenŭn p'yŏnji* (A letter to you) that aimed at revealing the truth of Kwangju. Pak died from liver cancer on September 10, 1998, at the age of forty-four.[24] The fact that he was the model for both P and K can be confirmed through various details in Im Ch'ŏru's fiction. In "Scribbles," Im wrote that in the fall of 1979, he joined a *madanggŭk* group called Kwangdae led by his friend P and even had a small part in a performance called "Twaeji p'uri" (Pig release): "The experience led me to decide that I wanted to devote myself to the cultural movement. Without asking for permission from my parents, I dropped out of school."[25]

At this juncture, it is once again Yun Sangwŏn's sacrifice that becomes the ultimate reference point. Im Ch'ŏru, who had not actively answered Pak Hyosŏn's summon to join him at the site of conflict, had looked to Pak as the symbol of the sacrifice that he had failed to make. But for Pak Hyosŏn, who fought at the site of the conflict but did not die there, Yun Sangwŏn was the symbol of the sacrifice he had failed to make. Within the space between two deaths created by Yun Sangwŏn's death, people imprisoned themselves and became subject to the ethics between two deaths created by such imprisonment. Both Pak Hyosŏn and Im belong to this category; in fact, so do Kim Ŭigŭi and Kim T'aehun, Pak Chongch'ŏl and Yi Hanyŏl. Each in his own way became Pak Kwanhyŏn and tried to assume the responsibility that attended this place as his own. Taking this analysis one step further, we might say that anyone who thought of the 1980s' spirit—represented by the fervent desire for democracy—as their own also stood in that very place.

The Century Inn ends with the sentence, "[t]here is an island, an island of shadows. Its name is Yŏngdo, and it's a name for neither fantasy nor fiction."[26] This sentence is presented on the final page of *The Century Inn* as the first sentence of the novel that Yi Chinu would go on to write, but it is also the first line of *The Century Inn*, the novel Im Ch'ŏru has already written. Yi Chinu discovers that his friend K is another version of himself, but this discovery is made possible because of his own history as a fiction writer, history not unlike that of Im Ch'ŏru himself. Turning his pen into an instrument

of atonement from his very first work of creation, Im Ch'ŏru did not cease writing about Kwangju. He continued writing about it even when people around him snubbed him for being behind the times or lacking originality, and even when his inability to brush these comments off made him enraged with himself.

Im Ch'ŏru's *Spring Days* reaches its climax with the last soliloquy of Yun Sangwŏn. Pak Hyosŏn's documentary called "Simingun Yun Sangwŏn" (Yun Sangwŏn, the citizen soldier) traces Yun Sangwŏn's life and death.[27] All roads lead to Yun Sangwŏn. Any story about Kwangju, even those that do not make any mention of him, is about Yun Sangwŏn in the end and the space between two deaths that he left behind.

Im Ch'ŏru's fiction and Pak Hyosŏn's theater are, to borrow Hannah Arendt's words, at once a "labor" for livelihood, "work" as artists, and "action" launched by ethico-political subjects.[28] Within the field of this "action," Im and Pak are no longer slaves of guilt but subjects of their own lives. Similarly, what Yi Chinu carried out in *The Century Inn* was no more than the act of confirming that he had already emerged as a subject. From the perspective of an outsider, the guilt felt by these men, each morally superior to the common fray, may seem "absurd." But it is only to the extent that they embrace this absurdity that they can become subjects. *The Century Inn* is a vivid dramatization of the particular process of subject-formation in which the self consciously embraces its own guilt as a condition of its emergence into subjectivity.

UNITY OF SIN AND RESPONSIBILITY: THE 1980S' SUBJECT AND KOREAN LITERATURE

Where the process of subject-formation is concerned, what ultimately matters is the question of responsibility, not the offense committed nor even the sense of guilt that the offense engenders. This is because guilt becomes meaningful only for those who take it upon themselves to stand in the place of someone who can take responsibility. Sin gains existence only through the process of retroaction that ratifies itself. We might say that it is responsibility that creates sin for the one who seeks to emerge as the subject of one's own life.

In modern Korean political history, the Kwangju Uprising was a truly unique event; at no other time had regular citizens armed themselves and

pointed their guns at the state's army, thus decoupling the nation and state and resisting the real power of the latter in the name of the symbolic power of the former. Both an actual revolt and a revolution at an ideological level, Kwangju was a profoundly transgressive political event. Its meaning would continue to resonate long after the suppression of the actual uprising, through the sacralization of the people who willingly gave up their lives to resist the state's deadly, violent power. In the aftermath, the enormous space of guilt created by the zeitgeist of the 1980s activated a field of responsibility within which countless subjects were formed. Looking at the intellectual history of Korea over the broad sweep of the twentieth century from this perspective, we can thus see that the spirit of the 1980s emblematized by the Kwangju Uprising represents one point of culmination in the process of subject-formation. This fact becomes all the more appreciable when we recall examples of what I earlier called "responsibility without offense."

This desire to take up responsibility though no offense has been committed finds its concrete expression in Yi Kwangsu's *Yujŏng* (Compassion, 1933) and Ch'oe Inhun's *Kwangjang* (The square, 1961). The male protagonists of these two novels advance toward death throughout the space of the novel, and indeed, succeed in dying in the end. The question is why. The men do not have legitimate reasons for dying, having committed no crimes punishable by death. What thus results is a paradoxical situation in which the characters gift themselves with self-punishment in the form of death. It goes without saying that suicide as a form of self-punishment is a fierce expression of ethics of responsibility.[29] Such a yearning to stand in the place of an entity who can take responsibility, even in the absence of the specific action that would give rise to this responsibility, is intimately connected to the desire for subjectivity. It is hardly an accident, then, that this desire becomes most marked in Korean literature produced during Japanese colonial rule and after the Korean War.

What about *The Century Inn*? Like Yi Kwangsu and Ch'oe Inhun before him, Im Ch'ŏru looked to stand in the place of the subject of action by claiming responsibility. So did Yi Chinu, the writer's alter ego in the novel. Playwright Pak Hyosŏn and student activist Pak Kwanhyŏn were no exceptions in this regard. What does differentiate these men's trajectory from those of their predecessors is that Kwangju became the concrete content to which responsibility could be tethered. While the fundamental incommensurability between crime and responsibility may be seen as the force that drives the

transformation of the human-animal into the human-subject, the content of the crime, when left empty, could lead the search for subjectivity into bizarre and deformed configurations.[30] The search for modern subjectivity manifested itself at the collective level in the demand for democratization that erupted in the June Uprising of 1987.

Kwangju, which was Im Ch'ŏru's curse, was also the womb of his craft. The tenacity with which he endured his guilt, holding on for over two decades to the ethics of two deaths generated by Kwangju allowed him to emerge as a subject who could enjoy the singular privilege of carrying, through his writing, the spirit of his times.

NOTES

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1. Translator's note: *chŏngsinsa*, translated here as "intellectual history," is the Korean equivalent of the German *geistesgeschichte*.

2. Mun Pusik set the American Cultural Center Korea in Pusan on fire on March 18, 1982, with the intention of interrogating US responsibility for the violent suppression of the Kwangju Uprising and the United States' continued support for the Chun dictatorship. Mun received the death sentence from the Republic of Korea Supreme Court in March 1983, but the sentence was commuted to a life sentence by presidential pardon. "Pusan Mi munhwawŏn panghwa Kim Hyŏnjang Mun Pusik p'igo sahyŏng hwakchŏng" [Death sentence confirmed for Kim Hyŏnjang and Mun Pusik, defendants in Pusan American Cultural Center arson], *Kyŏnghyang sinmun*, March 8, 1983: 7; and "Kim Hyŏnjang Mun Pusik mugi ro kamhyŏng" [Kim Hyŏnjang, Mun Pusik sentences reduced to life imprisonment], *Kyŏnghyang sinmun*, March 15, 1983: 7.

3. Mun Pusik, "Kwangki ŭi sidae rŭl saenggakham" [Thinking about an age of madness], 252.

4. Chŏng Kwari, "Sinbu esŏ sinbu ro kanŭn kil" [The path from a bride to a bride], 228.

5. Today, the official name is Kwangju Democratization movement. The name was adopted for the first time by the Thirteenth National Assembly launched in April of 1988. The Sixth Republic had been launched earlier that year, following the direct presidential election in 1987, the first democratic election held in South Korea in decades. The official name became further entrenched in two special laws that were passed: "The Law Concerning Reparation to Those Involved in the Kwangju Democratization Movement" (August 6, 1990) and "The Special Law Concerning the May 18th Democratization Movement" (December 21, 1995). For a detailed account of

the process by which the two laws were enacted, including the political circumstances surrounding the laws' passage, see Kim Chaegyun, *5.18 kwa Hanguk chŏngch'i* [The May 18 incident and Korean politics]. According to the announcement of the Martial Law Command on May 25, 1980, the riot was caused by the masses that turned into rioters at the instigation of "impure persons from other areas as well as resident North Korean spies" who disseminated vicious false rumors. "Kyeŏmsa 25-il hao palp'yomun Kwangju sat'ae kyesok kinjang [Martial Law Command statement on the afternoon of May 25: Kwangju situation remains tense], *Kyŏnghyang sinmun*, May 26, 1980: 1.

6. Kim Ŭigŭi and Kim T'aehun are representative in this regard. Kim Ŭigŭi (1959–80), then a Sogang University student, witnessed the atrocity at Kwangju and in order to let the world know about what happened, threw himself from the fifth floor of the Christian Building in Seoul on May 30, 1980. Kim T'aehun (1959–81), a Seoul National University student, jumped off the sixth floor of Seoul National University Library on May 27, 1981, the one-year anniversary of the suppression of the citizens' army occupying the Provincial Government Building in Kwangju.

7. Mun Pusik, "Kwangki ŭi sidae rŭl saenggakham," 240.

8. For a detailed account, see Sŏ Yŏngch'ae [Seo Young Chae], "Choeŭisik, wŏnhan, kŭndaesŏng: Yi Kwangsu wa Sosek'i" [Guilt, resentment and modernity: Yi Kwangsu and Sosek'i], 35; and Sŏ Yŏngch'ae, "Ch'oe Inhun sosŏl ŭi sedaeronjŏk t'ŭksŏng kwa sosŏlsajŏk wisang: Choeŭisik kwa chuch'ehwa" [The generational characteristics of Ch'oe Inhun's fiction and its status: Guilt and subjectification], 37.

9. According to Hannah Arendt, labor is an activity required for sustenance of a human being's life, and work is an activity that is invested in tasks that maintain continuity in the human created world. Action, on the other hand, is an activity conducted between human beings directly without the mediation of material objects. See Arent'ŭ Hanna [Hannah Arendt], *In'gan ŭi chokŏn* [The human condition], trans. Yi Chinu, 55–57.

10. Pak Chongch'ŏl's death occurred on January 14,1987 and Yi Hanyŏl's on July 5 of the same year. Yi was shot in the head on June 9 but died after twenty-seven days in a coma. Pak Chongch'ŏl's death was the detonator, and Yi Hanyŏl's death was the trigger. At first, the police reported that Pak's death had occurred suddenly and inexplicably during interrogation. Suspicions about the veracity of the announcement proliferated. When the public demand for an investigation into Pak's death grew, despite repeated attempts by the government to cover up what had happened, the physician who conducted the autopsy became a whistleblower. The entire process concentrated and amplified people's anger toward the government. Yi Hanyŏl's death five months later triggered the detonator. While Yi lay in a coma, the demonstrations of the June Uprising reached a ferocious climax. The Chun regime could no longer keep the university students corralled in their campuses, and when student demonstrations spilled out into

city centers, citizens joined the ranks of demonstrators. On June 29, 1987 the military dictatorship buckled under pressure and agreed to a constitutional reform that would institute direct elections.

11. In its Lacanian-Zizekian formulation, "the space between two deaths" refers to the space created by the gap between symbolic and actual deaths. The dead require symbolic registration of their deaths by the community in order to secure stable status. As Lacan noted, we all die twice. The space between two deaths emerges when the second death, i.e., the symbolic registration of death, has not been completed. Such space is occupied by entities whose physical death has not been certified by the community, or by ghosts that have not yet left the present world. Consequently, the space between the two deaths is a space where the sublime and the bizarre coexist. My usage of the concept in this chapter transposes it to the space between two different deaths that have actually occurred. In that the second actual death clearly reveals the affective power of the first death and the pulsations of the symbolic position's unstable energy, this case amplifies the original meaning of Lacan; it represents a much-strengthened space between the two deaths. For a detailed discussion of the Lacanian meaning of the space between two deaths, see Sŭllaboye Chijek [Slavoj Žižek], *Ideollogi ranŭn sunggohan taesang* [The sublime object of ideology], trans. Yi Suryŏn, 4.

12. For the lives and careers of the two men, see Pak Hojae and Im Nakp'yŏng, *Yun Sangwŏn p'yŏngjŏn* [A biography of Yun Sangwŏn]; and Ch'oe Yujŏng, *Pak Kwanhyŏn p'yŏngjŏn: Saebyŏk kigwanch'a* [A biography of Pak Kwanhyŏn: Dawn locomotive].

13. Numerous survivors maintain that Yun died from a bullet to the abdomen that was fired by an advancing soldier. Their testimonies refute the official explanation that Yun doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire, in an act of self-immolation. Based on testimonies and photographs, historian An Kilchŏng finds that Yun lost consciousness after sustaining a gunshot wound. His friends wrapped him in a blanket that caught fire shortly afterward. The resulting third-degree burns enabled the Republic of Korea Army Security Command later to assert fallaciously that Yun had committed suicide. An Kilchŏng, "Yun Sangwŏn ŭi sain e taehayŏ" [On Yun Sangwŏn's cause of death], 95–134.

14. Hwang Chiu, *Kyŏul—namu esŏ pom—namu ero* [Winter—from trees to spring—to trees], 124.

15. Hwang Chiu, "Mungnyŏm 5-pun 27-ch'o" [Observing silence, 5 minutes 27 seconds], 84.

16. Im Ch'ŏru, "Naksŏ, kil e taehayŏ" [Scribbles, about roads], 66.

17. The borrowed phrase comes from the section of Edgar Allan Poe's "Marginalia," published in *Graham's Magazine* in 1848: "Its title should be simple—a few plain words—'My Heart Laid Bare.' But—this little book must be true to its title. . . . No man dare write it. No man ever will dare write it. No man could write it, even if he dared. The

paper would shrivel and blaze at every touch of the fiery pen." Edgar Allan Poe, *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol.16, Marginalia—Eureka*, 128.

18. Han Ch'anghun, "Pyŏnt'ae" [Perversion], 119–20.

19. Im Ch'ŏru, "Naksŏ, kil e taehayŏ," 64.

20. Im Ch'ŏru, *Paengnyŏn yŏgwan* [The century inn], 309.

21. Ibid., 319.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 344.

24. "Sirhŏmsŏng namdallottŏn 'Kwangju chŏngsin' ŭi chik'imi" [Uniquely experimental preserver of the "Kwangju spirit"]. *Hangyŏre*, September 15, 1998: 18; and Pak Hyosŏn, *Kŭmhŭi ŭi owŏl* [Kŭmhŭi's May].

25. Im Ch'ŏru, "Naksŏ, kil e taehayŏ," 61.

26. Im Ch'ŏru, *Paengnyŏn yŏgwan*, 341.

27. Pak Hyosŏn, *Simingun Yun Sangwŏn* [Yun Sangwŏn, the citizen soldier], Kwangju MBC, 1996.

28. Arent'ŭ Hanna, *In'gan ŭi chokŏn*.

29. By contrast, a novel like Chang Yonghak's *Wŏnhyŏng ŭi chŏnsŏl* [The primordial legend 1962], is filled with criminal offenses and moral violations that do not engender a proper sense of guilt. For this reason, the ethics of responsibility has been foreclosed from the start, and transgressive or mythical power that the novel explores manifests itself through extreme violence.

30. The career of Yi Kwangsu provides a salient example.

11

From Martyrdom to Apostasy: Kim Chiha and the Politics of Death in South Korean Democratizations

YOUNGJU RYU

For a sense of what the name Kim Chiha once meant to the South Korean democratization movement, we might imagine ourselves in the audience at the Catholic Center in Wŏnju in January of 1979, at an event that bore Kim Chiha's name. Held in the last year of Park Chung Hee's (Pak Chŏnghŭi, 1961–79) power as the violence of his Yusin regime was escalating to a fevered pitch, the event gathered people in the name of a poet who was spending a better part of the decade in prison for penning works like *Ojŏk* (Five bandits), a biting satire that dared to speak truth to power, and *Kohaeng 1974* (Penance 1974), an exposé of the poet's life behind bars as a political prisoner. As this *Kim Chiha munhak ŭi pam* (Night of Kim Chiha's literature) wore on, another poet took to the stage to recite a verse dedicated to Kim Chiha:

> No one's child, no one's father
> You are Chiha, the people's poet
> Chiha, the nation's young revolutionary
> Chiha, the comrade of the conscientious in the six continents
> Chiha, the brother of the just throughout world's history . . .
> You appear and swallow the darkness . . .
> Your loneliness is the nation's
> Your despair is the people's
> Your will is ours and
> We are you . . .
> Rise as a corpse and then fall . . . [1]

In this poem, Ko Ŭn, himself one of the most active dissident poets of the entire Yusin era, turned Kim Chiha's name into an invocation no fewer than twenty-six times. What Ko Ŭn thus made clear was that Kim Chiha was no longer the single physical body incarcerated by the increasingly paranoid dictator. His loneliness was now the nation's and his despair the people's; Kim had become the proper name for all who suffer privation and persecution for the sake of justice and conscience—a martyr in other words, and as such, a potent call for revolution.

But what happens to a martyr who outlives martyrdom? Flash-forward three plus decades to the final months of 2012 and Kim Chiha is no longer a symbol but an embarrassment, less a martyr than an apostate for the South Korean left. In the run-up to the presidential election of 2012, which pitted Park Geun-hye (Pak Kŭnhye), Park Chung Hee's eldest daughter, against Moon Jae-in (Mun Chaein), a human rights lawyer who had once been jailed for participating in student demonstrations against the Yusin regime, Kim Chiha threw his support behind Park and proceeded to revive the term "*kkangt'ong ppalgaengi*" (rattlebrained commies) in describing an entire slew of opposition politicians and progressive intellectuals.[2] That *ppalgaengi* was a red-baiting label once hurled at Kim himself by the Yusin court was an irony few watching this drama could ignore; "*ppalgaengi*" was, moreover, a term whose currency was supposed to have expired with the end of the authoritarian era in South Korea. Speaking at a special lecture sponsored by an umbrella organization for some three hundred right-wing groups, Kim then went on to argue that the time had come for a woman to take the helm in South Korea and indeed the world.[3] Kim thus gave credence to the Park campaign's strategy of highlighting her biological sex as "the prepared female candidate" in order to occlude the fact that her platform was anything but feminist. Kim justified his support of Park's presidential bid in terms more cosmic and mythical than political, reaching back fourteen thousand years to the legends of the *Mago* (Mother Earth) forged on the "roof of the world" (Pamir mountains) to exalt the *yŏsŏngsŏng* (feminine principle).[4] The cosmic turn to this feminine principle was to be correlated also with a civilizational shift from the West to the East, as well as a new environmental understanding that would move beyond *saengt'aehak* (ecology) into what Kim called "*saengmyŏnghak*" (vitalogy). The audience, which grew visibly fidgety as the poet indulged himself in abstractions of cosmic scale, did not appear to take

the content of the lecture too seriously and reacted as though the content did not matter. What did matter was that the final message of support for Park had been delivered, and that it would reinforce the right photo op that had preceded the talk by a couple of weeks—an old icon of resistance chumming it up to the daughter of the man he had once had the guts to call fascist. This image would plaster the news and allow what remained of the Yusin-era martyr's symbolic value to be used by the conservative media to confer impunity on Park Chung Hee, the spectral paternal presence hovering behind the daughter's bid for the highest office in the land.

Understandably, the progressive reaction to Kim Chiha's *pyŏnjŏl* (political apostasy) or *chŏnhyang* (conversion) ranged from outrage to disbelief to feigned nonchalance: "Keep the poems. Erase the poet" (Cho Kuk); "Could this be Kim's latest work of satire?" (Ch'oe Insŏk); "Everyone's free to support whomever they want. But from the consistency principle of existential aesthetics, it's a pity that he insists on making the last years of his life such a sloppy mess" (Chin Chunggwŏn).[5] As an apostate, Kim Chiha's name became the latest addition to a long list of writers that begins famously with Yi Kwangsu, the nationalist-turned-collaborationist father of modern Korean literature whom the literary critic Kim Hyŏn once described as a "wound that festers more, the more you probe."[6] Less far back in history and in realms other than literature, this list of apostates also includes some of the Yusin era's most famous dissidents who turned conservative, if not reactionary, including Yi Chaeo, Kim Munsu, and Sim Chaech'ŏl and religious figures like the Rev. Kim Chinhong, who went from being the beloved champion of the urban poor in the 1970s to one of the chief architects of the New Right movement of the 2000s—the very movement that helped usher in a decade of conservative rule in South Korea.

So, to the extent that Kim Chiha is not simply an individual but an icon—once of resistance and now of accommodation—his story is at once a tale of a martyr who outlives martyrdom and of a society deeply divided about how to remember, narrate, and sacralize the sacrifices that were exacted in the process of its "compressed modernization."[7] As is well known, the thirty-three years that separate the two events with which I began this chapter witnessed South Korean society's transformation from military dictatorship to procedural democracy on one hand and from developmentalism to neoliberalism on the other. Though celebrated as unique among the formerly colo-

nized countries of the world for successfully achieving both industrialization and democratization, South Korea's vaunted path to modernization created profound contradictions and ruptures that we are still struggling to fully understand today. Of the many knots that this history has produced, Kim Chiha's story is doubtless one of the most painful. But it may also be one of the most illuminating.

This chapter enters Kim Chiha's story through two controversial pieces of writing that he produced on the topic of death. The first, "P'ungja nya chasal inya?" (Satire or suicide?), which appeared over two issues of *Siin* (The poet) magazine in 1970, was an elaboration of a sustained poetics of resistance that also provided a cogent and enormously influential theory of people-based *minjung* (the oppressed masses) aesthetics.[8] In contrast, his second piece sparked a controversy that intimated to the South Korean left that the pedestal upon which the erstwhile icon of democracy stood might not be all that solid after all. Published in May of 1991, at a particularly tense moment during the Roh Tae-woo (No T'aeu, 1988–93) presidency when university students and labor activists were setting themselves on fire in protest against the regime, Kim Chiha's "Chŏlmŭn pŏttŭl yŏksa esŏ muŏt ŭl paeuna?" (My young friends, what are you learning from history?) excoriated the resistance movement as nurturing a kind of collective death fetish. Reading these two works together and analyzing both their content and the political effects they unleashed, this chapter investigates the role that death—both actual and symbolic—played in the process of South Korea's democratization. How did Kim Chiha come to find himself at the heart of what might be called the politics of death, and how can we understand what happened to Kim Chiha after the end of the authoritarian era in terms of these politics, without resorting to too simple explanations such as apostasy or senility? Though we may very well discover, as Kim Hyŏn did with Yi Kwangsu, that Kim Chiha is one knot that will get more tortuous with our probing, our alternative cannot be that of keeping the poems and erasing the poet, even if such a prescription were possible to follow in the first place. Within the politics of death that shaped both the terrain of resistance during South Korea's authoritarian era and the configuration of competing narratives that delimited how the era would be remembered after its end, Kim Chiha is a singular presence who is not only a knot but a node.

CHASAL OR HAET'AL?

"Satire or Suicide," the most substantive and theoretical piece of literary criticism that Kim Chiha ever wrote, was a product of faulty memory. The title, and indeed the terms of the opposition that framed the entire essay, were lifted from the first line of Kim Suyŏng's 1961 poem; in the original poem, however, the choice offered was not between *p'ungja* (satire) and *chasal* (suicide), but satire and *haet'al* (deliverance): "Sister, if it isn't satire, then it's deliverance."[9] "Haet'al" (Hindi: vimoksa or vimutti), a Buddhist term for the state of enlightenment that enables sentient beings to break free from *samsara*, delivers a release from the cycle of rebirth into the worlds of suffering. Chasal, on the other hand, eliminates the physical self without the promise of metaphysical redemption. If the kind of release haet'al offers leads to transcendence, chasal is self-destruction that does not simultaneously open up some higher plane of existence. The substitution of haet'al with chasal, therefore, marked a crucial difference between the two poets. As Kim Chiha elaborated in the essay, the poet is someone at odds with their time. The possessor of a soul too sensitive to endure the violence and contradictions of a "life that resembles an incomprehensible monster," the poet must seek a release from the capture of that world of *mulsin* (fetishism) or combat it with a violence of their own expressed in poetry.[10] A powerful means of achieving the latter, p'ungja lies at the heart of any poetics of resistance. In framing the opposite term of "p'ungja" as "haet'al," however, Kim Suyŏng acknowledged the existence of a different poetics at the other end of the spectrum. To be sure, poetry could directly engage concrete reality and serve as a weapon of the weak against the individuals and structures of power that oppress them. But it could also address the more fundamental or abstract conditions of existence as such and become a cognitive and even a spiritual vehicle for the metaphysics of transcendence. A being thus enlightened lives in the world but is no longer of it and, by definition, is no longer part of the suffering masses. In a sense, Kim Suyŏng's entire oeuvre as a poet may be seen as resulting from the creative tension between these two poetic approaches.

Mindful of such valences of meaning associated with haet'al, we might argue that Kim Chiha's erroneous citation of Kim Suyŏng was less an accident than a parapraxis in the Freudian sense.[11] Though Kim Chiha would later go on to acknowledge his mistake as an unintended case of faulty memory,

what this mistake enabled in effect was the foreclosure of the possibility of transcendence altogether. And what this foreclosure enabled in turn was a new theory of poetry that would foreground the category of minjung. P'ungja, wrote Kim Chiha, was like "stones hurled at the actual evil in society, that is to say, the artistic embodiment of the hatred felt by the minjung victimized by such evil."[12] In misremembering haet'al as chasal, Kim Chiha drastically narrowed the spectrum of options available to a poet living through a dark time: "Time is running out. Take you pick, will it be 'satire or suicide'?"[13] There was no getting away from the concrete reality. Poets, and intellectuals for that matter, were not some enlightened beings who could exempt themselves metaphysically from the world of physical suffering in which the minjung was enmeshed. The poet, in fact, did not exist apart from the minjung: "[t]rusting in the great power of the minjung and resisting the desire to rise above it, [the poet] must enter its midst . . . and reach the state of self-affirmation as minjung."[14]

It was only by locating themselves within the genealogy of the people and inheriting the common artistic forms driven by the violence of satire that the modern poet could fight and ultimately overcome "the degrading and shameful stigma of the times engraved deep in their souls."[15] Kim Chiha thus put an end to the defining literary debate of the 1960s in which Kim Suyŏng too had participated prominently, the so-called contest between *ch'amyŏ* (engaged) and *sunsu* (pure) literature which premised certain elitism on the part of writers who saw themselves as intellectuals rather than as "the people" per se. In that debate's place, Kim Chiha introduced minjung as the new organizing principle for Korean literature of the new decade. He also distinguished the satire that he espoused from that which had animated Kim Suyŏng's poetry with such a potent modernist spirit of negation. While the older poet did successfully yoke satire to social criticism, mercilessly exposing all the "violence, crudeness, aggressiveness" of the given social reality, he wrongly directed the arrow of his satire at the minjung itself rather than at the privileged group oppressing the minjung.[16] Prescribing the opposite, Kim Chiha called for the revival of traditional oral literary genres like *p'ansori* (a sung tale) and *minyo* (folksong) and practiced what he preached in satirical works such as *Five Bandits* and *Piŏ* (A rumor). In addition, expanding the literature of resistance into the theater of resistance, Kim Chiha staged *Chinogwi* (Appeasing the spirit of the dead) in 1973, a work that Im Chint'aek locates at the start of the history of the *madanggŭk* (outdoor theater), which would spur on the revival

of the mask dance and folk drumming among students of the most elite universities in South Korea, even though these had been traditionally considered lowly forms of entertainment associated with commoners.[17] Into the 1980s, "minjung" would persist as the dominant term for collective resistance against authoritarianism and would help turn literature into the frontline of that struggle. In both theory and practice, then, it would hardly be an exaggeration to call Kim Chiha the father of minjung literature in South Korea. Eliminating the transcendental horizon from the creative act, Kim Chiha's parapraxis pushed the poet's craft to the extreme as a this-worldly art and maximized satire's potential as a weapon in the political struggle for justice.

Suicide: From Resistance to Revolution

For Kim Chiha, suicide was a very real option for poets in dark times. Like the proverbial canary in the coal mine, the poet was someone whose heightened sensitivity made them constitutionally more susceptible to the violence and absurdities of their society. Short of finding a proper way of expressing their despair in a poetic form—through satire, for example—they would find it impossible to continue to live as individuals. But what Kim Chiha also meant by suicide was the death of poetry as a historically relevant genre, "the utter defeat of poetry under the violence of reification."[18] According to Kim Chiha, the poet either located themselves in the heart of the concrete reality and mobilized their pen to effect a change in the existing structures of power or put an end to their life as a poet, acknowledging that their agonized creations are now "a piece of toilet paper torn away from life . . . or no better than a line in a pop song."[19] In the formulation "satire or suicide, take you pick," "suicide" was thus a strictly negative term for Kim Chiha.

And yet, in a manner not fully anticipated by Kim Chiha at the time he wrote the essay, "suicide" would go on to function as a positive term in its own right as an active mode of resistance throughout the 1970s. Two public suicides were pivotal in this regard. The first took place on November 13, 1970. In an event widely hailed as jumpstarting South Korea's labor movement, a young garment cutter named Chun Tae-il set himself on fire in order to bring attention to the cause of workers' rights, having unsuccessfully struggled to improve the working conditions in an industry on overdrive to meet the Park regime's export goals. His dying cry, "[o]bserve the legal labor standards. Don't let my death be in vain," became a fiery slogan that knitted

the student movement and the labor movement together. The second suicide took place on April 11, 1975, at a demonstration on Seoul National University campus against the Yusin regime. A student named Kim Sangjin got up to read what he had written as "a declaration of his conscience." Quoting Thomas Jefferson and the blood that waters the "tree of liberty," Kim Sangjin reminded the demonstrators that "democracy is not a product of knowledge but an outcome of struggle."[20] He then took out a long knife from the inside of his jacket and slashed his belly open. His last words to his shocked classmates as they rushed him to the university's central administration building were, "[s]ing the national anthem for me."[21] Kim Sangjin's death spawned a wave of protests that led the Park regime to pass the infamous Presidential Emergency Decree No. 9.[22] For both Chun Tae-il and Kim, the last words of the dying men became essential texts in their mythologization.

While I will not engage in a systematic and comparative discussion of suicide as a form of political protest, it is worth noting that the deaths of Chun Tae-il and Kim Sangjin conform to the pattern of suicide protest or self-immolation that sociologist Michael Biggs has analyzed. Biggs defines "suicide protest" as an act of self-killing committed publicly for "a collective cause." When it attracts the "approbation of others," the act "enters the repertoire of a political movement."[23] Around the world, from the protest against the end of the Prague Spring (1968) and its re-eruption in the Velvet Revolution (1989) to the more recent Arab Spring (2010–12), many large-scale political movements were ignited by the shock and outrage that self-immolations occasioned. In a similar fashion, the suicides of Chun Tae-il and Kim Sangjin entered the repertoire of the South Korean democratization movement in the 1970s. Despite the Park regime's attempt to control the explosive potential of these deaths by prohibiting a public funeral—going so far in the case of Kim Sangjin as to force his family to cremate his body just a day after his death—resignification of the two men's suicides as politically consequential events continued and proliferated over time.[24] Here, literature, especially poetry in the form of eulogy, served as an important device that both prolonged and amplified the reach of the original event. Recited at commemorative events, these eulogies had the effect not necessarily of mourning the dead so as to bring the life of the individual to a symbolic and meaningful close but of reanimating the death event over and over for an ever-expanding audience, thereby transforming the community of mourners into a politicized

body shamed into action. Kim Chiha himself produced a eulogy for Kim Sangjin, "A, a, Kim Sangjin" (Ah, ah, Kim Sangjin), and commemorative verses were written also by important dissident figures like Cho Yŏngnae, "Nodongja ŭi pulkkot—A, Chŏn T'aeil" (Ah, Chun Tae-il, labor's flame) and Sin Kyŏngnim, "Kim Sangjin yŏlsa ch'umosi" (Mourning Kim Sangjin). Ko Ŭn, who had invoked Kim Chiha's name at the gathering in Wŏnju in 1979, wrote a poem dedicated to Chun Tae-il as well:

His death was
Your beginning
My beginning
Gathering in haze
One by one
The beginning of the morning sea

In the heart of the night he was
Our beginning.[25]

We might stop here for a moment to note the similarity between this poem and "Calling Kim Chiha" cited earlier in this chapter. In both, the central operation is that of turning the eulogized individual into a figure whose sacrifice, conducted "in the heart of the night," marks the birth of a new community ("the morning sea"). The sacrificed individual dissolves into the common "we" as the distinction between "you" and "I" disappears. As the metaphors associated with light and dark in both poems clearly illustrate, this is a community, moreover, that claims a moral right—self-evident, and universally acknowledged—to engage in collective action.

The similarity between the two poems of Ko Ŭn's suggests that the manner in which Kim Chiha was received and signified within the 1970s' democratization movement followed the pattern set by Chun Tae-il's death. Even though Kim Chiha did not physically die, the poet's continued defiance of the Park regime, which led to Kim Chiha's long imprisonment and even placed him on death row for a time, was largely interpreted as a suicide of a kind. "Rise as a corpse, and then fall," cried Ko Ŭn in his eulogy for Kim Chiha. Thus, in a manner unintended by Kim Chiha himself at the time he wrote the essay, the choice became both satire and suicide where his own deployment

within the democratization movement was concerned. While satire represented the poet's chief weapon against the Park Chung Hee regime in his literary practice, it was the poet himself who became the most potent weapon of all for the resistance. In the life-and-death struggle against a dictator, waged at a time when "all paths [were] blocked and covered in darkness," the poet's symbolic death became an expressive text that lit the way—with its own "pitch-dark venom" as Ko Ŭn had eulogized—beyond words that delimited the formal boundaries of literature.[26]

End This Death Ritual Now

"A politically consequential self-immolation," argues Costica Bradatan, "is usually the first one in a series."[27] Though suicide protests continued in the 1980s in South Korea, primarily among university students, none occasioned the scale of response that Chun Tae-il's or Kim Sangjin's did.[28] Rather than self-immolations, it was the deaths of two university students caused by police brutality that gathered a galvanizing force in the lead-up to the June Democratization movement of 1987. Pak Chongch'ŏl's death from torture during police interrogations and Yi Hanyŏl's death from a teargas canister shot by the riot police during a demonstration opened the floodgates of popular unrest in the spring of 1987 that ultimately led to a historic victory for democracy. On June 29, 1987 Roh Tae-woo, who was lined up to inherit the presidency from Chun Doo-hwan, announced that he would accept the people's demand for constitutional reforms that would reinstate direct presidential elections.

It was in spring of 1991 that self-immolations flared up again and took the center stage of protest politics in South Korea. The death in April of Myŏngji University freshman Kang Kyŏngdae at the hands of the riot police set off a wave of self-immolations across the country in protest against the Roh regime. Unlike the suicides of the 1980s, or even of the previous year, which had failed to attract the kind of attention that "the first one of a series" had, these suicides in 1991 shocked the public by their sheer number. Seven people, including one high school student, set themselves on fire during the month of May alone, and several others died in connection to anti-government protests. As these deaths piled up in quick succession, the tense political situation that resulted began to be called *punsin chŏngguk* or the "self-immolation state of affairs."[29]

In the short four years since the victory of the democratization movement in 1987, how had things come to this? The sordid story of political intrigue during those four years is well known. Even though the June Uprising of 1987 had ended Chun Doo-hwan's military dictatorship in theory, the actual presidential election later that year failed to install a civilian government. Roh Tae-woo managed to carry the election after the opposition split the popular support along regional lines between two equally prominent dissident politicians, Kim Young-sam (Kim Yŏngsam) and Kim Dae Jung (Kim Taejung). When Roh's party, however, failed to obtain the majority in the National Assembly, Roh persuaded Kim Young-sam to agree to a merger which gave birth to the mammoth conservative ruling party, Minju Chayudang (Democratic Liberal Party). The Roh regime then ratcheted up its hardline policy of *kongan* (public security), a counter-offensive against the student and labor movement. Public security, in fact, had been Roh's rationale from the start of his presidency for maintaining the forms of state terror that Chun Doo-hwan had deployed, including the surveillance and persecution of student activists. The activist movement, for its part, was rapidly expanding in more radical directions such as the unification movement with North Korea.[30] As a political phenomenon, punsin chŏngguk was thus the second round in the clash between the military dictatorship and the resistance. The four years after 1987, however, introduced ironic twists that heightened the violence of this clash while also localizing it. In June of 1987, democracy had appeared to be the long-denied antidote to oppression but, from the perspective of activists in 1991, their cause had been betrayed by democratization. Though he continued largely to enforce the policies of his predecessor, albeit in a much more covert fashion, the military strongman was no longer the usurper of the Blue House but the democratically elected president. And though the crimes of the Chun Doo-hwan regime, including the massacre of civilians in Kwangju in 1980, had been brought fully to neither light nor justice, the millions of people who had flooded the streets in 1987 demanding justice had long gone back to their daily routines. Those who continued to struggle were both fewer in number and more radical.

It was precisely at this charged moment when the horrific spectacle of young people setting themselves ablaze was turning the screw on the Roh regime's *kongan* drive that Kim Chiha re-entered the spotlight as the author of "Chŏlmŭn pŏttŭl yŏksa esŏ muŏt ŭl paeuna?" (My young friends, what are

you learning from history?).[31] The opinion piece was published in the ultra-conservative newspaper *Chosŏn ilbo* and was addressed to the student movement at large. Like a teacher scolding his errant pupils, Kim Chiha berated his addressees, pelting rhetorical questions at them about the appropriateness of what he called *chugŭm ŭi kutp'an* (the ritual of death) in which they were now engaged. What did they think they were achieving with their "panegyric to death"? Were they certain about "the prospect of emancipation" that supposedly motivated their actions? What was their creed, "religion" or "materialist dialectics?" What did they learn from history and from the minjung in whose name they gave up their lives? Were they in their "right minds"?

Kim Chiha's column reflected a profoundly post-1987 understanding of the South Korean political situation. The South Korean nation was no longer at stake, according to Kim; the situation was not so "extreme and dire." Formal democracy, after all, had been achieved. If the prospect of emancipation that the students were holding onto was built upon the existing socialist model, that prospect was now as good as dead; socialist experiments around the world were falling like dominoes. To be sure, theirs was "a time of chaotic change," but what such times demanded was not thoughtless and boisterous action. The student activists were indulging themselves in a dangerous and self-destructive game, instead of "waiting with the patience that can endure bone-shaving pain" and engaging humbly in a search for the way forward. Macabre and sepulchral, their movement was neither animated by a reverence for life nor "spontaneous passion" but rather by a politicized ritualization of *sich'e sŏnhochŭng* (necrophilia): "[a] black phantom hovers about you now whose name is terrorism and fascism in the making." For this reason, Kim warned the students, their movement was headed down the path that had led radical social movements elsewhere in the world to catastrophic ends: "the nihilism of Nechayev, the massacre of People's Temple at Jonestown, the bloody trials of the United Japanese Red Army at Asama Mountain Lodge." Kim Chiha concluded his essay by advising the student activists not to despair but only after pronouncing their movement "finished."[32]

As devastating and offensive as such pronouncements must have been for Kim Chiha's addressees, the greatest blow to the movement came from the way Kim's essay enabled a war of representations regarding the status of the self-immolators. Since the deaths of Chun Tae-il and Kim Sangjin in the 1970s, self-immolators had been commemorated within the resistance as

yŏlsa, or the "righteous dead," a title reserved for those who had died while struggling righteously for their country and people. The most famous examples of yŏlsa in the past had been the independence fighters from the colonial era, such as Yu Kwansun and Yi Pongch'ang.[33] Honoring the self-immolators as yŏlsa, therefore, had the advantage of connecting the democratization movement to the colonial struggle for independence and legitimating these suicides as sacrifices for the sake of the country. We can see such a representation at work in Ko Ŭn's collection of forty-two eulogies to "*minjok minju yŏlsa*" (the righteous dead for the nation and democracy) published in 1988, which begins with Chun Tae-il and ends with Pak Raejŏn, a Korean literature major at Sungshil University who self-immolated in 1988 with his dying cry "Kwangju lives on." on his lips.[34]

As Kang Chŏngin has argued, an individual's suicide becomes a powerful political event only when it can secure two factors: "the purity of motivation" and "the autonomy of action."[35] Denying both with words like "*paehu*" (mastermind) and "*sŏndong*" (agitation), Kim Chiha's piece transformed the self-immolators from political subjects making an impossible choice at an impasse into passive dupes manipulated into an ultimately meaningless nonaction by the radical leadership of the movement. "Suicide infects," Kim argued. "You are fanning the contagion now. With the title of yŏlsa and massive funerals, you transmit the ceaseless signal of death and tempt the frail of heart. You clothe the annihilation of life in phantasmagoric fame."[36] Turning the yŏlsa, who had been represented as men and women brave enough to overcome the ultimate fear of death for the sacred cause of democracy, into the *yŏnyakhan yŏnghon* or "frail of heart" (literally "weak souls"), Kim suggested that activists' suicides were homicides in a deeper sense since they were an outcome of political manipulation.

The way Kim's essay was physically laid out in the *Chosŏn ilbo* highlighted this message. Even though Kim's title for the piece was "My Young Friends, What Are You Learning from History?" the newspaper gave the essay a much more incendiary subtitle: "Chugŭm ŭi kutp'an tangjang kŏdŏch'iwŏra. Hwansang ŭl kakko nugul sŏndonghana" (Put an end to this death ritual now. Who are you trying to agitate with its illusions?). Just as the word "yŏlsa" had a valence of meaning that connected it to the history of anti-colonial struggle, "paehu" and "sŏndong" were potently pregnant words that dredged up from modern Korean history the anticommunist fear of infiltration. And it was

precisely this fear that the Roh Tae-woo regime enflamed when it used Kim Chiha's essay as fresh ammunition for its *kongan* drive. Just days after the appearance of Kim Chiha's column, the Roh regime began its decisive counterattack against the punsin chŏngguk in the so-called Kang Kihun suicide note forgery case. The case concerned the self-immolation of a young labor organizer named Kim Kisŏl. On May 8, 1997, Kim Kisŏl set himself on fire and jumped off a building on Sogang University campus. Kim's suicide note, discovered in the pocket of the jacket that he had taken off before setting himself on fire, was two pages of eloquent prose, beginning with the lines: "I don't seek to become the spark of any reform movement and less a milestone in history. What I do is the enactment of the simple conclusion I reached after asking myself what I can do for the minjung living in sorrow and pain upon this land."[37] On the very same day of Kim Kisŏl's death, Pak Hong, the Jesuit priest who was then the president of Sogang University, held a press conference during which he swore with his hand on the Bible that behind the self-immolation "there were forces of agitation masterminding the death."[38] Ten days later, the prosecution announced that the mastermind had been found. Kang Kihun, a friend of Kim Kisŏl's and a fellow organizer at the Chŏn'guk Minjok Minju Undong Yŏnhap (Korean Federation of Movements for the Nation and Democracy), had coaxed the less educated Kim to commit suicide and then forged his suicide note. The premise for the prosecution was that since Kim Kisŏl was a high school dropout, he could not possibly have written the eloquent suicide note, and that it had to be the work of a college student. In a legal drama that has since been dubbed the Korean Dreyfus Affair, the prosecution brought in an expert witness to compare Kang's handwriting to that in Kim's note. The "expert" duly reported that despite the significant differences between Kang's handwriting and Kim's, the suicide note had indeed been forged by Kang. The trial also robbed Kim Kisŏl of his own final words, supposedly too elegant to have been written by a man of his class.

The incident had the effect of sealing the war of representation in the government's favor and turning the tide of public opinion against the punsin chŏngguk. It was Kim Chiha's essay, and the particularly incendiary framing that the *Chosŏn ilbo* had given it, which had started this war of representation. "After you raised the flag," an activist named Yu Kihong wrote in an enraged and agonized open letter to Kim just weeks after Kim's essay had appeared, "a march of madness has ensued, and even the dead are being disinterred and

put to death all over again."[39] Mourning and memorialization of the dead, of course, had become a tremendously important repertoire in performing dissidence and renewing the political life of a community. As discussed, public funerals became the occasion for instantiating and mobilizing a politicized body. In pairing the word "*kutp'an*" with death, however, Kim Chiha charged that the student movement was deploying the shamanic ritual in a manner completely opposed to its original spirit of strengthening or restoring communal life, whether in the form of *taedong kut* (the village ritual for health and abundance) or in the form of purification after *chinogwi kut* (ritual to appease the spirit of the dead) or *ssikkim kut* (ritual of cleansing). *Kut* in this traditional sense was always a life-affirming affair, a collective sharing of vitality that expanded and amplified *sinmyŏng* (the life force). Performing this ritual in praise of death, however, the activists were amplifying and proliferating death, not life, and every funeral extolling the given yŏlsa's virtues was, in effect, a fresh invitation to martyrdom, according to Kim Chiha. Despite the searing counterarguments offered by 1980s'-generation activists like Yu Kihong—the very intensity of the generational response a measure of the depth of the personal sense of betrayal they felt toward the very figure whose poems like "T'anŭn mongmarŭm ŭro" (With a burning thirst) had taught them how and why to yearn for democracy in the first place—the phrase "ritual of death" stuck. The major themes that Kim Chiha had introduced in the piece—fetishization and political manipulation of death, proposition of an impure controlling power agitating the student dissidents, suggestion that the student dissidents themselves are agitators of the innocent minjung, and the propagation of the notion of fascist tendencies of radicalism—became the government's sound bites that broke the back of the resurgent dissident movement. By mid-June of 1991, punsin chŏngguk was over.

The Untimely Poet

Rereading Kim Chiha's two pieces of writing side by side today, knowing the very different political effects they occasioned at the time of their respective publication, one is surprised to discover a substantial degree of continuity between them. At the heart of both works is reverence for *saengmyŏng* (life) and the recognition that this vitality is what constitutes the most fundamental characteristic of minjung. "An individual life is greater than the entire regime," Kim Chiha wrote in 1991. "Learn from the minjung [that you so

glorify] not to give up your life so flippantly. . . . Minjung's grip on life is tenacious no matter what the circumstance, its respect for and wisdom in service of life, profound."[40] Indeed, regarding the theory of minjung-based vitalism at least, it is possible to trace the arc of Kim Chiha's thought over time as an evolution rather than a conversion, from the prominence of Malttugi (a male peasant character in the traditional mask dance) as a figure of minjung virility in his early satires to his sustained engagement with the Tonghak teachings of Ch'oe Cheu and Ch'oe Sihyŏng since the 1980s.

Between the Kim Chiha of 1970 and the Kim Chiha of 1991, however, lies the 1980s. Park Chung Hee died in 1979, ending the era that had made Kim Chiha a martyr. But the manner of Park's death turned the dictator into a victim of sorts and the dictator's most prominent victim into a highly ambiguous moral category: a victim of a victim. The timing of Kim Chiha's release from prison, moreover, introduced additional wrinkles. Fearing Kim Chiha's impact as an icon of democracy, President Chun Doo-hwan kept Kim in prison until the Fifth Republic was well on its way; it was December of 1980 when Kim Chiha finally became a free man. During that fateful year after the death of Park Chung Hee, the brief Seoul Spring had come and gone, as had the massacre and the uprising in Kwangju. While Kim Chiha was still serving out a sentence as the Yusin era's greatest poet of resistance, the two landmark events passed the poet by and ushered in a new era of struggle, rendering the 1980s' terrain of resistance vastly different from that of the preceding decade.

Indeed, the 1980s was a time out of sync for Kim Chiha. Commercially, he had never been "hotter" and would never be so again. The very first year his works were permitted unrestricted circulation by the government, Kim Chiha became a publishing phenomenon. In 1984, "the year of Kim Chiha" according to Kim Pyŏngik, the poet had no fewer than three titles on the nonfiction bestseller list and interviews in three major weekly and monthly magazines.[41] Kim Chiha's handprints were on two major historical novels that had recently completed serialization, according to Kim Pyŏngik: Hwang Sokyong's (Hwang Sŏgyong) *Chang Kilsan* (1984) and Kim Chuyŏng's *Kaekchu* (1983). Minjung literature, whose theory and practice Kim Chiha had pioneered, had become the dominant force in the field. "If our society today is overflowing with minjung consciousness and a will toward minjung art," Kim Pyŏngik wrote, "we might look to 'the Kim Chiha syndrome' for providing the broad outlines."[42]

And yet, behind the syndrome, the poet and the movement that hailed Kim Chiha as their progenitor had actually diverged in orientation, and though this gap would not be publicly affirmed until the "death ritual" episode in 1991, the gap widened steadily throughout the 1980s. Over the concept of *kut*, which played a controversial part in 1991 as discussed above, we can find a specific and symptomatic instance of this divergence when we examine the different valences of meaning it developed for dissidents and Kim Chiha in the 1980s. For the dissidents, ritual had become the preeminent vehicle for performing collective resistance. Different aspects of the traditional ritual were adapted by the student and labor movement, from *p'uri*, a section of the *ssikkim kut* when the dead are allowed to give a full accounting of their grievances before being guided into the underworld, to *nori*, the fun and games that turned the ritual into a village festival. The frequency with which the terms "kut," "p'uri," and "nori" appear in the titles of the decades' most important dissident performances reveals the importance of the ritual form.[43] By the end of the decade, *haebang kut* (ritual for liberation), *nodong kut* (ritual for labor), and *t'ongil kut* (ritual for reunification) became staples in dissident performance. In the all-important street funeral for Yi Hanyŏl discussed earlier, for example, Yi Aeju's electrifying dance performance called *ssŏng p'uri* had the effect of amplifying the sense of injustice that the young man's death at the hands of the riot police had engendered, every contorted gesture of her body a fresh indictment against the Chun Doo-hwan regime. The goal of such performances was no longer representation.

According to Im Chint'aek, a pioneering figure in the minjung culture movement who adapted several of Kim Chiha's long satirical poems into the traditional sung tale genre of *p'ansori*, the emphasis shifted from *madanggŭk* to *madanggut* in the 1980s.[44] While the former still preserved its identity as theater, an aesthetic enterprise, the latter did away with the distinction between the stage and audience in a much more radical fashion. Rather than denoting a strict set of generic characteristics, this shift from theater to ritual meant "the transposition and expansion of culturalism into the arena of social movements, the shifting of weight from performativity to assembly."[45] The players' technical skills or the reproducibility and recognizability of the performance as an aesthetic enterprise in formal terms mattered less and less. What did matter was the creation through performance of a radical and singular evental site in which the largest number of people could be transformed

into participants. As the resistance movement, radicalized in the aftermath of Kwangju, sought a way of forging unity among life, play, and political struggle, kut's power of building, strengthening, and restoring a sense of community was channeled toward consciously revolutionary ends.

For Kim Chiha as well, kut took on a much more expanded and significant role in the development of his thought in the 1980s. The direction of this development, however, was opposite to that outlined above by Im Chint'aek. "The daily life of the minjung, the life of eating, the life of work, is in and of itself the holiest of holy kut," wrote Kim Chiha in 1985. "It is through this kut that the fragmentation of human life becomes whole and the divided nation reunified."[46] As a very broad term for communal nodal points in people's everyday efforts to sustain, reproduce, and proliferate life, "kut" became an abstract category to Kim Chiha.[47] The more basic and universal the terms of his philosophy became, the more cosmic the scale of his imagination, and what dropped out in the process was the domain of the political.

> Rice [pap] is something the heaven, the earth, and humans make together. Rice is food for the body and rice is food in terms of matter, but at the same time, rice is food for the spirit and food for the soul. For this reason, we refer to rice as 'life.' Where life is concerned, there is no fundamental difference between mind and matter, spirit and body. This is also the reason why rice is life, life that is also unity [t'ongil]. Life is unity, and life is rice.[48]

In the Korean context, the word "t'*ongil*" has an immediately political register of referring to reunification between North and South. Subsuming this register under the cosmic tautology between food and life, what Kim Chiha emptied out in effect was the space of political intervention in the here and now. If every aspect of the daily life of the people, especially eating and working together, was already a kut, how was it to provide an extraordinary occasion for knitting a collective body together, maximizing its political power, and deploying it against the dictatorial regime? In a sense, the transcendental plane that Kim Chiha had practically foreclosed in 1970 by misremembering Kim Suyŏng's dilemma as "p'ungja or chasal" rather than "p'ungja or haet'al" had come back to swallow up everything else. While the resistance movement had gotten more radical, more austere, more politicized, and decidedly more this-worldly, the poet had awakened in prison to "the principle of life that

would turn the inside of the prison cell to the great outdoors."[49] The violent vitalism of Malttugi's satire had turned into a version of adherence to Tonghak that sought higher and higher planes of universality. "I am a believer of Tonghak," Kim Chiha would go on to write in 2002. "Not Ch'ŏndogyo, but the original Tonghak, the Tonghak of Ch'oe Cheu and Ch'oe Kyŏngsang. I am now a believer of Tonghak. Through Tonghak, I integrate everything."[50] The millennial declaration of equality that represented the most fundamental tenet of Tonghak—*in nae ch'ŏn* (human and God are one)—evolved in Kim Chiha to become an embrace of the yin over yang, the maternal over the phallogocentric, in essence, all things round and soft rather than things with hard edges. As Ch'ae Kwangsŏk commented of *Aerin*, Kim Chiha's highly anticipated volumes of poetry published in 1986, the poet had given up straight lines in favor of "curves."[51]

Perhaps for Kim Chiha, Chun Doo-hwan was never his dictator, and the 1980s' struggle against Chun never Kim's battle to fight. At a time when student activists clamored to hear Kim Chiha's voice, so long denied to them, and rediscover in it the sharpest weapon they could launch against the conjunction of forces that had brought about Kwangju—military dictatorship, American imperialism, comprador capital—Kim Chiha had given up his sword. Coming belatedly to the 1980s, Kim Chiha had bypassed the political passions of the decade and arrived proleptically to a post-authoritarian state of being at the very height of authoritarianism. He no longer wrote p'ungja and told admirers of "With a Burning Thirst" that the poem did not suit the reality anymore. Instead, as the 1980s drew to a close, Kim Chiha published a volume of lyric poetry, containing a beautifully simple verse titled "Paraem I" (Wish I).

Should the time come
to unsheathe my sword again,
blade,
may you turn
into a lotus blossom.[52]

In the poem that began this essay, Ko Ŭn had commanded Kim Chiha to die in prison: "Don't you walk out of prison alive/ Rise as a corpse then fall."[53] The line was meant to be ironic, of course. Throughout the Yusin era,

no one worked harder to release Kim Chiha from prison than Ko Ŭn. But the line was not just ironic. It encoded the older poet's wish that Kim Chiha would endure as a political symbol of resistance, and that this symbol would shine like a diamond in the ashes of the poet's life as an individual. In prison, however, Kim Chiha had seen the wonder of life residing in something seemingly as trivial as "an Ailanthus seed taking root between the bars of the cell window."[54] An individual's life contained all the mysteries of the cosmos. As if to resist the movement's attempt to sacralize him as yŏlsa, Kim Chiha confessed all his failings as a frail individual in a newspaper column which appeared shortly before "the ritual of death" essay. "Call me by name," the column's deck read. "I want to be liberated from *chiha*."[55] *Chiha*, an obvious pun on the poet's pen name, means "underground" in Korean.

Life in Death, Death in Life

In the final analysis, the painful knot that is Kim Chiha in the history of South Korean democratization allows us to conceptualize the interplay among several different meanings of death that operated in its unfolding. Here, it is once again the death of Chun Tae-il that provides an important reference point. When the young garment cutter set himself on fire in the heart of South Korea's sweatshop district, holding a volume of *Ch'ukcho kŭllo kijunpŏp haesŏlsŏ* (Essential guide to laws on labor standards) to his heart, what his dying cry revealed to anyone who would listen was the existence of a "bare life" in the interstices of South Korean industrialization, those young boys and girls excluded from the "polis" where the protection of labor laws would apply, but still exposed to all the violence of the state power.[56] His death created a crack in the political fiction of the national body (*minjok*) as an all-inclusive community, a fiction that the state had deployed so effectively in postwar and postcolonial South Korea. Chun's poignant wish for a "college student friend" who could tell him what all the Chinese characters in the *Essential Guide to Laws on Labor Standards* meant was a devastating indictment against his status as a bare life. This crack would grow and become a social movement. The indictment was especially mortifying for Cho Yŏngnae, a student of law who had entered the prestigious Seoul National University as the highest-ranking student of his entire class and who was thus assured of a privileged place in the polis from which Chun had been excluded.[57] Responding to the powerful call that Chun's death issued, university students

like Cho would begin the construction of a new dissident body politic called *undongkwŏn*—a "counterpublic sphere" according to Namhee Lee—from within the heart of the existing political community.[58] To put it in terms of the distinction made famous by Giorgio Agamben, Chun chose to end his *zoe* (natural life) in order to protest the systematic exclusion of the proletariat from *bios* (political life), and gained in the process a new life as an honored and honorary citizen within this alternative political community.

Adapting Namhee Lee's concept of the counterpublic sphere, we might call this new political community a "counter-republic." It was the particular brilliance of Kim Chiha to name the minjung the banner of this counter-republic. University students entered this community by giving up *kidŭkkwŏn*, their guaranteed places in the existing polis, and forged a horizontal relationship of solidarity with those whom the existing polis had relegated to the status of a bare life.

Like Chun Tae-il's suicide, Kim Chiha's imprisonment was a powerful call to join the counter-republic. Repeatedly arrested, subjected to torture, and forced to suffer the whims of the Yusin court that sentenced him to death and then to life, Kim Chiha himself became a proof for the tyranny of the state's power over life and death. Park Chung Hee had once decreed death for the poet, the physical end of the poet's natural life. Such a death would have completed Kim's martyrdom and fixed him permanently as an immortal and unchanging political symbol. Perhaps realizing this, the dictator allowed the poet to continue the rest of his life in prison (while executing eight other, less prominent men). The poet was allowed to die a slow death in a state of artificial isolation, with the very activities that sustain natural life curtailed or prohibited altogether.

Borrowing Agamben's phrasing, we might say that the poet's own life as zoe became the battleground for the contestation with the state. Zoe, in turn, became the pillar of Kim Chiha's metaphysics through the long days and nights of his imprisonment during the Yusin era. Concretized in terms like "*sallim*" (literally, "to make live") and *pap* (rice), Kim Chiha's vitalogy was in the first instance the refusal of death, a turn toward metaphysics that resulted from his physical incarceration.

In the meantime, outside in the world and in the counter-republic that Kim Chiha had helped to found, things had changed. The shock of Kwangju had pushed the resistance movement into a realm beyond resistance: revolu-

tion. The two suicides that symbolized the 1970s' movement had still been appeals to the nation-state. Chun, for example, called for the observation of labor laws already in place, and Kim's dying wish was to hear his classmates sing the national anthem. The counter-republic demanded of the state that it become a more just entity, that it stop killing, and that it recognize the right of workers and freedom of people. By the 1980s, however, the state had become something to be extirpated altogether. After Kwangju, the movement would no longer sing the national anthem. Upward of two thousand people lay dead, wounded, or missing in that city, and the state had revealed its naked face as a mass murderer. The only way to appease these victims of state terror would be to seek revenge and punish the murderer. A song commemorating those massacred in Kwangju—"*Nim ŭl wihan haengjin'gok*" (March for the beloved)—took the place of the national anthem, a sign of the extreme loss of faith in the South Korean nation-state.[59] No longer would activists make appeals or demands of the existing polis. Shedding the adjective "counter," their revolution would focus on emerging as the republic of the entire Korean minjung over the republic of the half nation-state. From this revolutionary perspective, the victory of the movement in June of 1987 was no victory at all, especially since it did not lead to a regime change. In a sense, then, the self-immolations of 1991 may be seen as attempts to restoke the fire of the revolution which had fizzled out prematurely without bringing about a radical reconfiguration of the political system or reunification with North Korea.

At such a time, what could haet'al mean but the dissipation of anger that should knit this political body together and amplify its collective energy into a revolutionary force? How could the poet have broken free of samsara and reached nirvana alone, when Kwangju's dead were still roaming the earth, too aggrieved to move on to the next life? Implicit in the movement's charged response to Kim Chiha's opinion piece in 1991 was a deep dismay over the poet's diagnosis that theirs was "not a time of extreme crisis when the fate of the nation is at stake."[60] To the extent that the poet's Tonghak-derived vitalistic metaphysics embraced an ultimate message of reconciliation, it was a proleptic prescription since the time for such reconciliation was not yet. What, after all, would be the use of preaching life to an unrepentant mass murderer?

The question remains unresolved in South Korea today. Yet, what is also true is that such questions seem to have lost all of their political and moral

urgency that they once had. Instead of being resolved, so many conflicts and dilemmas that the ethico-political passions of the 1970s and 80s were motivated by and produced in turn were merely sutured. And it hardly seems to matter that the seams have come apart for many of them. Take, for example, the recent conclusion to the retrial of the suicide note forgery case of 1991 that we discussed earlier. In May of 2015, South Korea's supreme court found Kang Kihun not guilty of the charge of forging Kim Kisŏl's suicide note, throwing out the testimony of the handwriting expert that the prosecution had used as its chief evidence. Thus, the case finally came to an end, twenty-four years after the prosecutors of the Roh Tae-woo regime had a young man framed in order to spin punsin chŏngguk as a sustained ritual of death. The twenty-four years of detainment had destroyed Kang's life, but Kang's demand for an apology from those responsible was met by a resounding silence. Interviewed after the court decision, Nam Kich'un, one of the prosecutors who had investigated the case, responded that there was nothing to apologize for: "A decision made during the Chosŏn Dynasty, even one made by King Sejong, would result in a different conclusion when judged by today's standards."[61]

As Kang Kihun's case reveals, the post-authoritarian order of institutionalized democracy in South Korea failed to introduce what it said it would: a genuinely new era of truth, reconciliation, and political integration. No one who used state power to kill, wound, and torture another has had to pay for their actions in any serious way—the two presidents who issued public apologies for past state actions against its citizens had both been victims of state violence themselves.[62] With the right so unrepentant, the left did not need to be self-reflexive or innovative, since its moral raison d'etre had already been secured by what it opposes. The two political forces that clashed so violently during those decades—one delimited by the sovereign power of the strongly authoritarian, developmental state and the other united into radical action under the banner of minjung, democracy, and unification—thus persisted in their fragmentation as the opposite poles of the political terrain. Rather than enriching and diversifying the political field, this fragmentation spawned cynicism about the very possibility of a national consensus, which in turn led to a widespread phenomenon of political apathy.

So here are a few of the dead, mourned or unmourned, celebrated or forgotten in the vaunted path of South Korean democratization: Chun Tae-il and

Kim Sangjin, whose deaths started a movement; Pak Chongch'ŏl and Yi Hanyŏl, whose deaths brought the military dictatorship to its knees; Pak Raejŏn, whose death turned his older brother into a lifelong activist; and Kim Kisŏl, whose tragic death, instead of reigniting a flagging movement became a witness to its end, and whose death was denied the dignity of subjective action and the poignancy of its last words by a posthumous manipulation.[63] And what of Kim Chiha? Disavowed by the alternative political community that he had helped to launch and whose revolutionary force he had helped to kill—both with his pen—Kim Chiha's living presence has signified his death as an undying political symbol of democracy. During the two decades that followed the publication of "the death ritual" essay, Kim Chiha has been called into the spotlight every once in a while, sometimes with nostalgia by the left. More recently, however, the invitation has come increasingly from the right, as if to wave the poet's "apostasy" in the face of the left and embarrass the children of democratization by parading their "senile" father in public. Duly embarrassed, the children have tried to close their eyes and ears. "Thinking of Etienne Balibar's words to his teacher Althusser after Althusser had lost his mind, [I plead] . . . Chiha, may you keep silent," wrote one critic in 2012 at the height of controversy that Kim Chiha's support of Park Geun-hye sparked. "To return to active duty this way is to die an eternal death."[64]

This chapter has been an attempt to find a proper place in history for this death-in-life of Kim Chiha. An indication of the failure of productive and creative integration between the two political visions that collided so violently to shape the second half of the twentieth century, Kim Chiha's status today of suspended death—which is also suspended life—is a symptom of an impasse that has so long shaped the terrain of South Korean politics. Following the dramatic sequence of events of 2016–17 that impeached Park Geun-hye and put her on trial, dare one hope that the impasse has finally been broken? Has the South Korean society finally moved beyond the twentieth century opposition of developmental dictatorship and democratization, having extinguished with the light of citizens' sixteen million candles the Park Geun-hye regime's attempt to restoke the flames of nostalgia for the era of developmental dictatorship? And in this brave new dawn, might we turn to Kim Chiha again and embrace all the cacophonous ways that his name has mattered?

NOTES

1. Ko Ŭn's poem, "Chiha rŭl purŭnda" [Calling Kim Chiha], was never formally published but appeared in the program for the Wŏnju Catholic Center's "Kim Chiha munhak ŭi pam" [Night of Kim Chiha's literature]. An excerpt of the poem in English translation appears in Youngju Ryu, *Writers of the Winter Republic*, 60.

2. Kim Chiha, "Hallyu rŭnesangsŭ karomangnŭn 'ssukpujaengi'" ["False aster" blocks the renaissance of the Korean wave].

3. Kim Chiha gave a special lecture titled "I kamun nal e pigurŭm" [Rain cloud on this dry day] at the Korea Federation of Banks building in Seoul on November 26, 2012. The lecture was sponsored by Pŏm Simin Sahoe Tanch'e Yŏnhap (Citizens Group United). Kim Chiha's entire lecture that day can be viewed on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJ8nGDOhUEnboCNrAvKNo14xUOsWEe_Gh.

4. Ibid.

5. Yi Yunju, "Kŭ ŭi si man kanjik hago ije kŭ rŭl chiunda" [I erase him and keep his poems only].

6. Kim Hyŏn, *Yi Kwangsu*, 11.

7. I use this influential term coined by Kyung-Sup Chang in 1999. Kyung-Sup Chang, "Compressed Modernity and Its Discontents."

8. I quote from the version of the text reprinted in the literary journal *Chakka segye* in 1989 as part of a special issue devoted to Kim Chiha. See Kim Chiha, "P'ungja nya chasal inya" [Satire of suicide?], 60–71.

9. The line comes from Kim Suyŏng, *Nuiya changhagona!* [I'm proud of you, sister!]

10. Kim Chiha, "Pungja nya chasal inya," 60.

11. Ko Hyŏnch'ŏl has argued that this was an intentional misreading on Kim Chiha's part, and that it allowed the poet to simultaneously acknowledge his debt to Kim Suyŏng and refract the direction of the older poet's satire away from the modernist spirit that had animated it. See Ko Hyŏnch'ŏl, "Kim Suyŏng kwa Kim Chiha-ssi ŭi t'al singminjuŭi chŏllyak pigyo yŏn'gu" [Comparison of Kim Suyŏng], 139.

12. Kim Chiha, "P'ungja nya chasal inya," 70.

13. Ibid., 71.

14. Ibid., 68.

15. Ibid., 60.

16. Ibid., 69.

17. According to Im Chint'aek, "Chinogwi" was the first *madanggŭk*. The postwar stage in Korea had been dominated by productions of Western plays in translation, and while the demand for theater attuned to the reality of the Korean peasants and workers had been steadily on the rise, it was not until the appearance in 1973 of "Chinogwi" that Korean folk forms of performance including mask dance, drumming, and *p'ansori* were married to narrative theater in a thoroughly hybrid form whose content concerned the

everyday plight of the urban and rural poor. Because Kim Chiha had initially planned to stage the work in rural villages, he eliminated staging props and lighting and did away with the act-scene structure as well. Thus was born a work that could be performed in *madang* (an open outdoor space) and which would do away with the formal separation between the stage and the audience. The inherently participatory nature of such performances would become a hallmark of *madanggŭk* as theater of resistance. See Im Chint'aek, "80-yŏndae yŏnhŭi yesul undong ŭi chŏn'gae: *Madanggŭk, madanggut, minjokkŭk* ŭl chungsim ŭro" [Development of the performing arts movement in the 1980s: Focusing on outdoor theater, outdoor ritual, and national theater, 314–35.

18. Kim Chiha, "P'ungja nya chasal inya," 61.

19. Ibid., 60–61.

20. Kim Sangjin's final words are quoted in Kang Chunman, *Han'guk hyŏndaesa sanch'aek 1970-yŏndae p'yon II* [A stroll through contemporary Korean history: 1970s, Volume 2], 238–40.

21. Kim Chŏngnam, "Kim Chŏngnam ŭi chŭngŏn Pak Chŏnghŭi sidae" [Kim Chŏngnam witnesses the Park Chung Hee era].

22. The Presidential Emergency Decree No. 9 was announced on May 13, 1975 in the official gazette (kwanbo). The full text is available online at the National Archives of Korea. http://theme.archives.go.kr/viewer/common/archWebViewer.do?singleData=N&archiveEventId=0028073237.

23. Michael Biggs, "Self-Immolation in Context, 1963–2012," 143–49.

24. Yu Sich'un, et al., "75-yŏn Kim Sangjin yŏlsa halbok chagyŏl" [Kim Sangjin's self-disembowelment in 1975].

25. Ko Ŭn, "Chŏn T'aeil."

26. Ko Ŭn, "Chiha rŭl purŭnda."

27. Costica Bradatan, "The Political Psychology of Self-Immolation."

28. Following the shock of the Kwangju Uprising, the South Korean student movement took on an increasingly anti-American character. Of the dozen or more college students who committed suicide protests throughout the decade, several, including Kim Sejin, Yi Chaeho, Yi Tongsu, and Chin Sŏngil called explicitly for the end of American imperialism in Korea. Growing anti-Americanism in the South Korean student movement was accompanied on the one hand by the proliferation of a brand of ultra-nationalism that embraced North Korea and on the other by an explosion of interest in Marxist-Leninist critique of capitalism. See Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 116–27.

29. Kang Chunman, *Hanguk hyŏndaesa sanch'aek 1990-yŏndae p'yŏn I* [A stroll through contemporary Korean History: 1980s Volume 1], 83.

30. When democratization as a revolutionary slogan lost much of its edge after the institutionalization of procedural democracy in 1987, the dissident movement focused more on the goal of unification with the North. Reverend Mun Ikhwan's visit to North

Korea in March 1989 helped to punctuate this reorientation. The visit, however, also provided the Roh regime with the pretext for a comprehensive "public security" drive. The regime launched "a combined investigative command" and arrested hundreds of individuals affiliated not only with the unification movement but also with progressive media, academic and cultural organizations critical of the government, and labor unions and organizations. Kim Dae Jung himself and his party also came under attack. See Yi Ch'angŏn, "Chŏn Tuhwan No T'aeu ch'ŏngkwŏn kwa kongan t'ongch'i" [Security regimes of Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo], 79–81.

31. Kim Chiha, "Chŏlmŭn pŏttŭl yŏksa esŏ muŏt ŭl paeuna?" [My young friends, what are you learning from history?].

32. Ibid., A14.

33. Yu Kwansun and Yi Pongch'ang died in Japanese custody after participating in anti-colonial resistance movements. The Korean government officially recognizes such figures as the patriotic dead, reserving titles such as *ŭisa* (the righteous one) or *yŏlsa* (the ardent one).

34. See Ko Ŭn, "I chugŭm iyŏ haebang ŭro saraora" [Death, comeback as liberation], 86–135.

35. Kang Chŏngin, "Chŏngch'i, chugŭm, chinsil," 14.

36. Kim Chiha, "Chŏlmŭn pŏttŭl yŏksa esŏ muŏt ŭl paeuna?" A14.

37. A photocopy image of Kim Kisŏl's note can be found in Ko Simyŏn, "Chŏn'guk Minjok Minju Undong Yŏnhap (yakch'ing 'Chŏnminnyŏn') sahoe pujang 'Kim Kisŏl yusŏ' wa kwallyŏn hayŏ 'Kang Kihun yusŏ taep'il ŭihok sakŏn' (1991-yŏn) e taehan chaesim kaesi kyŏlchŏng (2012-yŏn) kwa kŭ sidaesajŏk ŭimi" [The historical meaning of the retrial (2012) of the "Kang Kihun Forgery Case" (1991) concerning the "suicide note of Kang Kihun"], 20.

38. Quoted in Kang Chŏng-in, "Chŏngch'i, chugŭm, chinsil," 14.

39. Yu Kihong, "Kim Chiha siin todaech'e wae irŏsimnikka" [Poet Kim Chiha, why in the world are you doing this?], 183. Yu Kihong was then the vice president of the Federation of Democratic Youth Movements (Minju Ch'ŏngnyŏn Undong Yŏnhap). In December of 2012, following Kim Chiha's declaration of support for Park Geun-hye, Yu revisited this open letter in a newspaper column called "Siin Kim Chiha nŭn 1991–yŏn imi chugŏtta" [Kim Chiha the poet was dead in 1991].

40. Kim Chiha, "Chŏlmun pŏttŭl yŏksa esŏ muŏt ŭl paeuna?" A14.

41. Kim Pyŏngik, "Kim Chiha hyŏnsang" [The Kim Chiha phenomenon], 190–94.

42. Ibid., 192.

43. A partial list would include *Twaeji p'uri* [The pig's tale], *Horangi nori* [The tiger's play], *Kwanak kut* [Ritual of Kwanak], *Chang p'uri* [The merchant's tale], *Nong p'uri* [The farmer's tale], *Somori t'al kut* [Masked ritual of cowherds], and *Ch'am minjok haebang ŭl wihan kŏri kut* [Ritual for the liberation of the real nation].

44. Im Chint'aek, "80-yŏndae yŏnhŭi yesul undong ŭi chŏn'gae."

45. Ibid., 326.

46. Kim Chiha, *Namnyŏktang paennorae* [Boating songs of the south], 269.

47. See Kim Chiha, Pap [Rice], 99–101.

48. Ibid., 61.

49. Hŏ Munmyŏng, *Kim Chiha wa kŭ ŭi sidae* [Kim Chiha and his times], 381.

50. Kim Chiha, *Kim Chiha chŏnjip I* [Complete works of Kim Chiha I], 721–22.

51. Ch'ae Kwangsŏk, "*Hwangt'o esŏ Aerin*" [From Hwangt'o to Aerin], 5–8.

52. Kim Chiha, "Paraem I" [Wish, I], 130.

53. Ko Ŭn, "Chiha rŭl purŭnda" [Calling Kim Chiha].

54. Hŏ Munmyŏng, *Kim Chiha wa kŭ ŭi sidae*, 380.

55. Kim Chiha, "Na nŭn tojŏk, kobaek undong pŏrija" [I'm a bandit: Let's wage a campaign of confession], A3.

56. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, 109.

57. Cho Yŏngnae went on to write a tremendously influential biography of Chun Tae-il's life and became a labor and human rights lawyer. See Cho Yŏngnae, *Chŏn T'aeil p'yŏngjŏn* [Biography of Chun Tae-il].

58. Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*.

59. I understand the rise of interest in North Korea's *chuch'e* ideology and the valorization of Kim Il-sung within certain segments of the student movement along this vein as a consequence of the vacuum of authority created by the loss of faith in the South Korean government.

60. Kim Chiha, "Chŏlmŭn pŏttŭl yŏksa esŏ muot ŭl paeuna?" A14.

61. Quoted in Kim Ŭigyŏm, "Kang Kihun ŭi 24–yŏn e taehan ch'oesohan ŭi yeŭi" [The least etiquette that Kang Kihun's twenty-four years deserve].

62. The most egregious example probably concerns the restitution of the status of the victims of Kwangju. In 1997, the South Korean government declared May 18 as a national day of commemoration in recognition of what transpired in Kwangju in May of 1980 as *minjuhwa undong* (democratization movement). The military leaders responsible for the massacre, however, evaded the full force of justice. After the spectacles of Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo on trial, the former presidents went back to their prosperous lives, making only a short detour in prison, not too significantly worse for wear.

63. When his younger brother, an aspiring poet, committed self-immolation in 1988, Pak Raegun was a Korean literature major at Yonsei University. Pak Raegun has been a human rights activist ever since and is currently the director of "Solidarity for 416," a citizens' group calling for Sewŏl Ferry investigations.

64. Hwang Hodŏk, "Chiha yŏ, ch'immuk hasosŏ."

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SUICIDE AND MARTYRDOM are closely intertwined with social and political processes in historical and contemporary Korea. In this first book-length volume on the evolving ideals of honorable death and martyrdom from the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) to contemporary South Korea, interdisciplinary essays explore the changing ways in which Korean historical agents have considered what constitutes a socio-politically meaningful death and how the surviving community should remember such events.

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